

# THE NEW DAWN

TEFERRA SHIAWL KIDANE-KAL

THE NEW DAWN

ISBN 978-9966-05-093-3

© 2008 Teferra Shiawl Kidane-kal

Year of publication 2008-07-20

*Printed By:*

Elite Prepress Ltd.

P.O. Box 75289 – 00200,

Nairobi, Kenya.

Email: [info@elitedigitalprepress.co.ke](mailto:info@elitedigitalprepress.co.ke)

*Cover designed by:*

Sylvia Moraa Nyamasyo

TEFERRA SHIAWL KIDANE-KAL

P.O. Box 4201,

Addis Ababa,

Ethiopia.

Email: [teferra@mac.com](mailto:teferra@mac.com) or

[shiawl2@yahoo.com](mailto:shiawl2@yahoo.com)

*To My Wife and Children*

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE .....	9
CHAPTER TWO .....	27
CHAPTER THREE.....	39
CHAPTER FOUR.....	53
CHAPTER FIVE.....	65
CHAPTER SEVEN.....	85
CHAPTER EIGHT .....	91
CHAPTER NINE .....	101
CHAPTER TEN.....	107
CHAPTER ELEVEN.....	127
CHAPTER TWELVE .....	145
CHAPTER THIRTEEN.....	164
CHAPTER FOURTEEN.....	188
CHAPTER FIFTEEN .....	194
CHAPTER SIXTEEN.....	198
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN .....	206
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.....	218
CHAPTER NINETEEN.....	224
CHAPTER TWENTY.....	232
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE .....	238
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO .....	246
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE .....	262
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR.....	266
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE .....	276
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX.....	282
EPILOGUE.....	299

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First, I want to thank my wife and life-long partner Woineshet Kebede Wagaye, my first-born son Marcos and my very close friends Zewditu Tesfaye Tequame and Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot, for their valuable contributions, constant encouragement and support while I was writing my story.

I also want to thank Seyoum Mesfin, Tekeda Alemu and Kasahun Dender for their encouragement. My particular gratitude also goes to Captain Getachew Wolde Mariam, Fasika Sidelil and Ambassador Hiruy Amanuel who read the late draft and offered valuable thoughts. My sons Ashenafi and Henok Teferra contributed in a significant way to the final proofreading of the manuscript.

Dawit Zawde, Costantinos Berhe Tesfu, Mulugeta Luleh, Tadele Yidneqachew and Tamrat Kebede have given me information and professional advice as well as moral support. Girma Beshah provided invaluable advice and guidance. My special thanks go to Sylvia M. Nyamasyo of Elite Prepress Ltd of Kenya for assisting me in finalizing the publication of this book.

All my UN colleagues, from Addis Ababa, New York, Geneva, West Africa, Central Africa and Baghdad have always been supportive and I want to thank them for motivating me to write my story.

My thoughts also go especially to the late Ato Ketema Yifru, Dr. Kifle Wodajo, Ambassador Assefa Lemma, Dr. Amanuel Gebre Selassie, Dejazmatch Kassa, Wolde Mariam, Dejazmatch Girmachew Tekle Hawariyat, and Ambassador Tibebu Bekele who mentored me, and a whole generation of fellow Ethiopians that shared most valuable information while they were still alive. Any possible omissions and errors in this book should be ascribed to the author.

## **Introduction**

This is a story of the life of a veteran Ethiopian diplomat narrating the experiences of a generation of public servants while at the same time bearing witness to the events that unfolded over the last fifty years in the history of Ethiopia.

The events described in this book are from first-hand observation augmented by information obtained directly from national and international actors. Major landmarks in Ethiopian history after the liberation of the country from Italian Fascist aggression, the rule under the monarchy, the rise and fall of the military dictatorship, and the pain and gain of Ethiopia up to and including the coming to power of the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front / EPRDF have been rendered in a summarised form.

After the end of the Cold War, it was said that ideological conflict was over. This was a delusion. International relations have continued to be predicated by a world of clashing national ambitions and interests. This is what I have tried to bring to the readers' attention.

Some of my illustrious predecessors who served Ethiopian Diplomacy have written their observations in greater detail. They devoted their fullest energy and skills to the struggle for the survival of Ethiopia's independence, for African liberation, for World Peace, for economic development and for international cooperation.

This book was also intended as a modest tribute to those numerous friends, mentors and colleagues who rendered commendable service to the development of African diplomacy.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### *Early Formative Years*

My name is Teferra Shiawl Kidane-kal. I was born on the Tuesday evening, of October 14<sup>th</sup> 1943, in Menagesha, Marcos District of Shoa, located twenty kilometres west of the Ethiopian Capital Addis Ababa. The country was still recovering from the effects of Italian colonial aggression that had been repulsed two years earlier.

My father, Aleqa (Senior Pastor) Shiawl Kidane-kal, who later on became Ato Shiawl, abandoned his priesthood at Menagesha St. Marcos Seminary to join resistance fighters soon after Marshal Grazziani unleashed massacre on innocent civilians in Addis Ababa. He was welcomed as a member of the resistance movement by the formidable guerrilla leader, Dejazmatch Kebede Bezunesh.

During the war of resistance against Italian aggression, my father had shown exemplary bravery and was awarded a Singer sewing machine and a motorcycle from among items and armament captured from an Italian military convoy at Wolmera near Menagesha, not far from Holetta. After the war, Dejazmatch Kebede Bezunesh served his country as Senator and Governor for several decades. My father led the humbler life of a village tailor.

I was happy to meet Dejazmatch Kebede in 1964, when I was a young student in Germany. During his visit there,

where he was leading a group of senior parliamentarians invited by the Bundestag, he encouraged me and other Ethiopian students to emulate Germans by working hard to advance our country to a higher level of development. That was indeed a tough proposition. We may not have emulated the Germans, but we did our best to learn the best from what they could offer us in our chosen fields of study.

In the wake of the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia, Dejazmatch Kebede chose to mount an armed resistance against the military government, the Dreg, but was outgunned during the ensuing skirmishes at Gende Beret in western Shoa and took his own life rather than surrender to what he believed was a God-less and un-Ethiopian regime.

My father was very much affected by Dejazmatch Kebede's death. He could not publicly display his rage at the demise of a system that he had known all his life, especially when the whole population was gripped by fear of callous arrests, torture and killings that agents of the junta meted out on a defenceless populace.

Though my father was fond of the military and supported the family from his tailoring profession that depended mainly on the personnel stationed at the Military School in Holetta, he could never accept the killing, in the name of a revolution, of countless compatriots. At the height of the military-led red terror campaign in 1977, I myself was to suffer harsh imprisonment for nothing more than expressing views that

could be twisted and viewed as subversive. My father was always more cautious.

My mother, Sasahulish Kidane was born and raised in a peasant family near Debre Sina but had settled in Menagesha where she met my father. They were married in 1941 during the sun set years of the Italian occupation. They had their first son Mekonnen who died few years later.

The aftermath of the Italian occupation dislocated many families including mine and as I was later told, my parents separated by mutual consent after the war and my mother went back to north central Ethiopia where she lived until her death in 1990.

When my parents separated in 1946, I was barely three years old. My father took custody of me and relocated to Betcho, a locality fifty kilometres out of Addis Ababa, where he took up teaching.

During the early forties in Menagesha, to make up for the loss of motherly care, a close relative, Mama Feleqech, literally breast-fed me together with her own son Getachew, who grew up to serve his country as a distinguished officer of the Imperial Body Guard and a unit commander of the UN forces during the first post-independence Congo crisis in 1961. Captain Getachew started his own business after his return from the Congo and went into exile to the United States when life was made unbearable for private entrepreneurs during the rule of military junta, the Provisional

Military Administrative Council (Derg) that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie. Getachew returned home only after the military junta itself was ousted in 1991.

Getachew and I were destined to study together in the sixties at Haile Selassie I University alongside his close friend, Major Asrat Desta. They were trained in the US and after brief teaching assignments at Harar Military Academy and their UN Peace Keeping missions in the Congo, both officers relocated to Addis.

Asrat, a soft-spoken officer, became an important figure in the military junta. Like General Teferi Bante, the Chairman of the Derg, and other unfortunate members of the junta, Asrat was among the victims of the February 1977 power struggle and purge within the Derg.

Long before World War II, the Holetta Military School had always been at the centre of events in modern military history of Ethiopia. A fellow political prisoner during the late seventies, Tadesse Metcha, had written earlier on the subject and narrated at length on the resistance struggle of the early thirties against Italian invasion. The young officer cadets from Holetta had organized themselves into a formidable guerrilla unit; 'The Black Lion Force' and in fact succeeded in destroying several Italian aircraft that were deployed to the western sector in Wellega.

I grew up in Holetta, in a broken home. Despite all the effort by my understanding stepmother, Mama Fanaye

Worqeh, life was not the same as it would have been with my own mother. The saving grace was the beautiful scenery, the sweet water, vineyards and the orchards Italian colonizers had developed earlier and of course, my childhood friends.

I also had the good luck of being brought up by a wonderful grand mother, Mama Likyelesh Gebre. All these amenities almost, but not fully compensated for the loneliness and abandonment that I often felt as a young boy. Mama Likyelesh, who died in 1967 at a grand old age estimated at over 100, always tried to instil in me discipline, cleanliness and moderation in food and in every aspect of life. A tall order at times! Noting my restlessness and talkative nature as a young child, my grandmother used to say to me; “God gave you one mouth and two ears, so listen more and speak less.” I have since tried my best to strike that balance, though not always with success.

As a young boy, my first experience with the prevailing criminal justice system in Imperial Ethiopia was watching how punishment was meted out on thieves and common criminals. In those days, robbers and thieves caught in the act were brought before the district judge and sentenced to forty lashes. The sentences were carried out openly at a market place where the town folk and others who came from outlying districts gathered. The thieves’ hands and feet would be tied with ropes and while suspended, the lashes were administered on the back of every condemned thief. The flogging would continue even after their backs bled.

Though I could not condone any act of robbery, I could not help but detest the cruel corporal punishment the criminals suffered. The lucky ones had their appeals heard by a higher court presided over by a venerable judge, Ato Eshete and most often ended up with a lighter verdict. Justice Eshete's son, Harvard educated Professor Andreas Eshete who often visited us in Holetta, grew up to become a reputed academic serving as President of Addis Ababa University in the late nineties and into the new Millennium.

I grew up with slightly older schoolmates and dear friends like Dr. Zawde Abate, who later became a Harvard intellectual; Seifu Tekle Mariam, an accomplished lawyer and businessman; Dr. Tesfaye Bayou, a police medical officer; his brother Mebratie Wolde Michel, an astute technocrat; Fetu Oumar, a self-made and prosperous industrialist; Bedilu Duki and Gizaw Diriba, both Generals of the Ethiopian armed forces; Tafesse Muluneh, a physicist that settled in the US in later years; and Assefa Alemayehu, a highly disciplined child who grew up to be an officer and a gentleman of the Imperial Army.

These and my other closest classmates, Brigadier Lemma Kibret, Dr. Teshome Teklu, Negussie Mengesha; Godfather to my first son Marcos, as well as Abebe Kassaye, Tadesse Abebe and Mahdere Ayele gave me their love and attention and always wanted me to be successful in life. As young children we were very close and most of us kept regular contact even later on in life. Among all my childhood friends, Seifu Tekle Mariam and Bedilu Duki have remained the

closest to me. Seifu, who had in fact been commissioned as a naval officer before he embarked on his law studies in Addis Ababa and later on at Columbia University in New York, is a soft-spoken, highly disciplined and compassionate person. His brother-in-law, Ato Abraham Gebre Mariam, a native of Adwa in Tigray and mayor of Holetta at the time, was perhaps a pioneer in shaping our outlook and political thinking as he always took pleasure in reciting to us children in the neighbourhood all the interesting stories he had read from books and periodicals he acquired whenever he travelled to the capital. He was a great orator and a gifted writer. He lived close to our house and that proximity gave me the unique opportunity to learn from him.

Bedilu has always remained a man with a big heart, uncompromisingly honest and capable of making personal sacrifices when it came to helping people unjustly treated by others. These characteristics often got him into conflict with his senior officers, supervisors, and immediate family members, but he always prevailed.

Despite the usually unbalanced diet that poverty had imposed on my family, I grew up as a healthy child. My first shock however, was in the spring of 1956, after I tried to jump the pole vault at our school playground and broke my left arm during the fall. Lemma Kibret, kind hearted as he was, was more affected by my predicament and could not stop sobbing till some help arrived. Army medics at the nearby Military School came immediately and nursed me.

That night, I remember, for lack of a painkiller, my father gave me small doses of heavy liquor to ease the pain and help me get some sleep. In the morning I was rushed to Menelik Hospital in the capital, Addis Ababa. This was my first visit albeit under such unfortunate circumstances. I saw horse-drawn chariots or *Gari*, for the first time and my father and I used them for inner-city transportation to the hospital. There, a friendly English doctor bandaged my broken arm in a Gypsum Cast and with that hand I sat a few months later for the National Elementary School Leaving Examination.

Perhaps it was my broken arm that helped me concentrate on my studies while my classmates enjoyed playing. I emerged top in the class when the results were posted on the school notice board at the beginning of the new school year.

An Indian instructor, Mr. Ganapathi, who later followed us to high school in Debre Berhan where he lived in retirement until his death at the grand old age of eighty; Ato Hailu Wodajo, the diligent Headmaster; Tekle Haymanot Abay, Woizero Laqech, Ato Mitiku, Ato Begashaw, Sergeant Shifferaw, Kifle Yitbarek as well as Alemayehu Melaku who were the best teachers I have ever known. They always gave us encouragement and support.

Holetta is a beautiful village in a rural setting with agreeable temperate climate throughout the year. That was the reason why Emperor Menelik II chose to build one of his palaces there in the late 1880s. Later on, Emperor Haile Selassie set up a Military Academy that bore his name until



the young army officers who overthrew him in 1974 changed it to Genet Military School. In 1990 their successors, the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Front (EPRDF), briefly turned the Academy into a place for detention of former officials. In 2007 it was restored to its former function as a military academy and the staff college renamed General Hayelom Araya Military Academy after a famous EPRDF commander.

Since 2004, in response to an attractive business and soil conditions in Holetta, foreign and local investors have engaged in the rapidly growing floriculture sector. Holetta became one of the hubs for economic investment, earning considerable foreign exchange particularly from the export of a variety of long sustaining species of flowers. In the process the small village developed into a medium-sized town by Ethiopian standards.

Back in early fifties, Saudi Arabia and Yemen were not as fully endowed with their enormous oil riches as they are today. Several thousand Yemenis and Saudis lived and thrived in Ethiopia as small shopkeepers. Just as in the days of Prophet Mohamed when their ancestors were persecuted at home and an Ethiopian king gave them refuge, in our time too, our Arab neighbours continued to be welcomed as brothers and sisters. Many of them who lived in Holetta and other provinces intermarried with Ethiopians. One of their prominent offspring, billionaire Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Hussein Ali Al Amoudi who was born in Woldiya in the central province of Wello, prospered in his other home, Saudi Arabia, and became a man who literally thought like his late

Ethiopian mother - always helping, caring and dispensing. He has continued to assist the sick and the destitute that sought his help. He has managed to build a global business empire, heavily investing also in several development projects in his motherland. In 2008, Sheikh Dr. Mohamed Al Amoudi opened up agricultural and other development projects in Holetta and even modernized the main road that lead to my hometown. That road was fittingly named after the great philanthropist. In September 2007 the Federal Government of Ethiopia honoured him with its highest award - the Gold Medal of the Ethiopian Millennium.

During the forties and fifties, Emperor Haile Selassie visited Holetta every year to preside over the cadets' graduation. As small children, we would run after his car and he would treat us to sweets and small cash handouts. His fatherly smile was captivating and he always took pleasure in the company of small children. The Emperor even took pride in directly supervising the Ministry of Education for a long time after the liberation of Ethiopia.

While growing up in Holetta in the early fifties, a friendly village tailor named Argaw Ahmedeh got us interested in world events. He was one of the two people in our village who owned a battery-operated radio set. The other was Mohamed Beredauni, a citizen of Saudi Arabia. After school we would all congregate at Argaw's house to listen to world news from Radio Ethiopia and the Imperial Body Guard Radio that was set up after the successful campaign by the Ethiopian contingent of the UN forces in Korea. Argaw and

his family were so generous that they even fed us while treating us to the radio programs.

The Commanders of the Imperial Body Guard, while setting up the Radio, had further ambitions that went far beyond simply providing entertainment to their listeners. They were slowly engaging in sensitising the public to open their eyes to modern developments outside Ethiopia, thereby enhancing the popularity of the Brigade as well as inviting the army's envy. The Radio station soon became very popular and posed a serious challenge to the national radio. Ato Mekonnen Habte Wold, the Emperor's Propaganda Chief, who saw imminent danger if the Body Guard Radio was allowed to continue broadcasting, initiated and implemented the decision to close down the station. This generated much anger against him within the ranks of the Imperial Guard and reformist civilian intellectuals.

Ato Mekonnen Habte Wold's proximity to the Imperial centre of power enabled him to give orders to any minister and was feared by almost all the courtesans of the imperial regime. He was reputed to having at his command a network of spies and petty informants who kept him abreast of the situation in the country. In turn he would brief the Emperor. Ato Mekonnen controlled the imperial media and ensured that various activities via the National Patriotic Association (HAGER FIKIR), where he also served as President, took centre stage. Ato Mekonnen understood the power of information and he oversaw at different times finance, trade and industry sectors. Despite the fact that there was a minister

in place, he was the real supervisor of the Ministry of Information. The Imperial Body Guard did not fail to settle scores with Ato Mekonnen during their 1960 coup that will be discussed further.

In the fifties, young students and boy scouts from the capital and other provinces used to make excursion trips to Holetta in response to a good public relations exercise by the Military School. That was my first time to see Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot.

Tesfaye and I did not establish close contact then but we met some years later and to this day we have related well as close family, with common successes and tribulations – a life of exemplary friendship that I will recount in the next chapters.

After I completed elementary school, my first choice was General Wingate Secondary School in Addis Ababa where students with best results were enrolled. However, that was not to be because at the start of the new school year in early October 1957, I was assigned, along with all other classmates, to Debre Berhan Haile Mariam Mamo Secondary School. The school was named after a famous resistance fighter against Italian occupation. Several years later, I served in the Foreign Ministry with his son, Ambassador Zewde Haile Mariam.

At that time the Emperor wanted Shoa Province to open its own High school where successful students would be sent.

This would end the dominance of the already established schools in the capital. When we complained, Dr. Kebede Michael, then Director General of Education who occasionally came to visit us in Debre Berhan advised us that His Majesty would not take such complaints lightly.

1958 was the year the Soviets launched the first *Sputnik* spacecraft. It captured the imagination of all young students as our Indian science teacher in Debre Berhan, Mr. Simon, explained how Russian scientists managed to put the first satellite into space.

Our first year in high school was very lively until education authorities felt that the facilities would soon face congestion especially with the growing student population. They decided we should all be day students in the second year with a mere twenty Birr a month stipend. Our Amharic language teacher Ato Zewde, who used every opportunity to criticize the feudal regime, had already begun to shape our political outlook. We thus felt emboldened to lodge our protest with the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa.

Led by Gebre Admasu, who later on served his country as an accomplished economist, we chartered an early morning bus in Debre Berhan and after reaching Arat Kilo in Addis, which marched the short distance from Miazia 27th Square to present our petition to the Minister for Education, a young Oxford graduate, Lij Endalkachew Mekonnen. He would not yield to our demands to be reinstated as boarding students. That was when most of us felt we had to devise ways and

means to be enrolled in boarding schools, no matter the location.

Upon our return to Debre Berhan, I went to the town hospital where a kind-hearted Finnish doctor who was aware of the history of my broken arm, and considering the effect the biting cold of Debre Berhan would have on my health, wrote a letter recommending for my immediate transfer to a warmer place. He sent me to the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa where upon reaching and while waiting at the gates to gain entry, I met a young college graduate who had just arrived from the US.

On noticing my state of helplessness, the young man ushered me into his office after which he called the American Director of the Evangelical College in Debrezeit (Bishoftu), Mr. William Wright who secured a place for me. My benefactor was Ato Tadesse Terefe, who later on worked at UNESCO in various capacities until he was appointed by Lij Endalkachew to serve in his cabinet as Minister for Education in the early seventies.

After the fall of Endalkachew's cabinet in 1974, Tadesse became Ethiopia's Ambassador to Geneva and Bonn where he served until his retirement in 1989. I discovered later, during a discussion with his spouse and my UN colleague, Seble Demeke, that Tadesse was indeed my young benefactor.

At that time, during his brief discussion with Mr. Wright, Tadesse had made an ideal arrangement for me to proceed immediately to Debrezeit, with the Ministry paying for my boarding. I was lucky considering the popularity of Debre Zeit, due to its beautiful lakes and resort areas, as well as possibility of free film shows and other entertainment facilities at the nearby Harar Meda Air Force Base. Mr. Wright was gracious and immediately facilitated my smooth start in Debre Zeit.

I have never regretted swapping the bitter cold of Debre Berhan with the mild holiday resort of Debrezeit. The only regret I had at the time was leaving behind my wonderful classmates and friends, among them Mulugeta Luleh, who grew up as an avid reader, a prolific writer and a prominent journalist. Mulugeta could recite word for word the small Concise Oxford Dictionary. He still possesses a gigantic memory. His writings were also well researched and often full of wit.

The newspaper and the periodical (TOBIA) that Mulugeta helped establish following the mass dismissal of senior journalists in 1992 from the government media, gained popularity and attracted wider readership. His criticism of the new regime and his association with the former order did not endear him to the powers that be. Mulugeta now lives in exile in the US.

After the Liberation of Ethiopia from Italian occupation, the Emperor had built a small palace that he named

“Fairfield” after his exile home in England where he had lived for about five years. Emperor Haile Selassie loved to name some of the nice resort areas in the country after biblical names such as Nazareth, the commercial capital of the Oromia Ethiopia’s largest Regional State; Debrezeit, literally translated to Mount of Olives and Hagere Heywot, Country of Life. All the three towns have reverted to their old names, Adama, Bishoftu and Ambo respectively.

Our high school instructors in Debre Zeit who came from diverse Lutheran missionary societies in the US, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Finland were reinforced by the best Ethiopian scholars whom the Ethiopian Evangelical Church - Mekane Yesus - could provide. Professor Ezra Gebre Medhin, Professor Ephraim Isaac and Dr. Solomon Enquay were among our Ethiopian mentors.

All our teachers were university and college professors who had responded to a call by their respective missionary societies to teach in Ethiopia and help in the development efforts of the Emperor, who in a spirit of tolerance and Christian brotherhood and despite opposition by extremist Orthodox clergy, always encouraged missionaries to work in Ethiopia.

Among the missionary teachers was Professor Sven Rubenson, a Swedish historian who followed us to the University. As an academician of repute whose publications on Ethiopian history had won world acclaim, he continued to inculcate in us in-depth knowledge of our own history. He



returned to Sweden and retired in Lund after several decades in Ethiopia. I had the pleasure of studying at the Ethiopian Evangelical College in the same league as bright young men who later on had their own successes in life. Among them were Wond Wossen Alemu, a radio journalist; Aklu Girgire and Tesfaye Zemo, both agricultural economists; Dr. Fasil Nahom, a distinguished legal scholar; Mergia Azeze and Bekele Mekonnen, civil engineers; Dr. Teshome Akale Heywot, a physicist who immigrated to Canada; Drs Teferra Tizzazu and Kiber-ab Fre, both medical practitioners and playwright Teferi Buzuayehu.

Sundays were reserved for us to meet cadets of the Air Force Academy when they came to listen to the school choir sing, perhaps more out of the desire to interact with the young girls in our school. My friend Teferi, besides being an avid reader and a movie addict, was an accomplished tenor singer. He looked and acted like the famous Italian singer Pavarotti. Teferi studied in the Soviet Union and Germany and immigrated to the UK after the socialist revolution where he died a few years later.

It was a great sensation in our school when the young Harvard graduate, Professor Ephraim Isaac - an Ethiopian of Jewish extraction, came to Debrezeit and trained the school choir which later on performed *Handel's Messiah* in Amharic in the presence of the Emperor.

After attaining his first degree at the University College in Addis Ababa and during his graduate and postgraduate

studies in the US, Ephraim had gained in-depth knowledge of the world's religions, ancient languages and philosophy and distinguished himself as a great conductor as well.

The choir that Ephraim had trained gave a good performance when the famous American Evangelist Billy Graham visited Ethiopia in 1961 and preached to a huge congregation at the Addis Ababa Stadium. Some of us who were not gifted singers served as counsellors. Our History of Religions teacher, Professor Ezra Gebre Medhin had prepared us well for the task.

Ephraim's most distinguishing mark was his love for Ethiopian traditional attire. Years later I was very happy to meet him again in Princeton, always in his shining white Ethiopian traditional outfit. In the new Millennium he frequently shuttled between Ethiopia and the US as a peace activist.

On being awarded the degree of *Honoris Causa* by his alma mater in 2004, Professor Ephraim Isaac gave his entire speech in Geez; the ancient liturgical language only used by Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox church clerics. Perhaps he was the first intellectual to do so at such an academic convocation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Winds Of Change*

One sunny December morning in 1960, Radio Ethiopia was broadcasting only martial music. Apparently a coup by members of the Imperial Body Guard led by Brigadier General Mengistu Neway was underway in Addis. Our school warden, Ato Wondimu Yinadu broke the news to us during the morning break. The Director, Mr. Wright, also came and joined the discussion. Radio Ethiopia then started broadcasting decrees and directives from the new revolutionary command headquarters. Several officials were rounded up or summoned ostensibly to attend a meeting at the palace with Empress Mennen where they were detained to await their fate.

While all this was going on, the Emperor was on a state visit to Brazil and the Crown Prince Asfa Wossen was proclaiming, apparently under duress, that he would thenceforth live as a normal citizen on a monthly salary that would be allotted to him. It sounded like feudalism was coming to an end. The Army, led by General Merid Mengesha refused to join the rebellion led by his archrival General Mengistu Neway, the Commander of the Imperial Guards.

As General Merid began to mobilise the Paramilitary Police and the Air Force to jointly crush the coup, the

Emperor confidently rushed back to Ethiopia. That was the beginning of the end for the rebels.

Although Air Force Commander General Assefa Ayene seemed to hesitate at first, he was encouraged to decide in favour of the Emperor, following discussions with a group of army officers led by Colonel Kebede Wagaye, that was hastily dispatched to the air base by Defence Minister General Merid Mengesha. From his lake-side residence, the Air Force Commander gave orders to pilots of the newly acquired American F-86 fighters and T-33 trainer jets at Harar Meda Air Base to take off.

As the jets flew their first sorties over positions held by the rebels, they scared the entrenched Body Guard and the population on the ground with their sonic boom. Other lighter aircraft were busy scattering propaganda leaflets to the troops and the public urging their continued loyalty to the Emperor. The psychological blow was effective.

It soon became apparent that negotiations in Addis Ababa through representatives of the Imperial Regime and the rebel group, conducted mainly between two close friends, Major Assefa Lemma representing the Government side and Germame Neway representing the rebels had failed. Even the last-minute intervention by the old Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Abuna Basilios could not help. His Holiness could not persuade General Mengistu and his US-educated but socialist oriented younger brother Germame to abandon the coup attempt.

General Merid Mengesha, who in the meantime consolidated the support of Army Chief of Staff General Kebede Gebre, as well as the Police Para-commando Chief, General Tadesse Birru, amassed enough firepower and outgunned the guards.

On the third day, the Emperor's plane, though partially crippled, was skilfully piloted by the famous senior Ethiopian pilot, Captain Alemayehu Abebe and landed at Asmara to be welcomed by the Chief Executive of Eritrea, Bitwoded Asfaha Wolde Michael. At the same time, the infamous "Green Saloon Massacre" of fifteen senior officials was taking place at the *Gennete Li'ul* Imperial palace in Addis Ababa. The rebel General and his brother soon realised that the coup had been foiled and fled to the countryside. Before they left the palace grounds, however, they executed the Emperor's officials whom they had held hostage and had referred to in their earlier radio broadcasts as exploiters.

The victims included the famous leader of Ethiopian Resistance against Italian invasion, Ras Abebe Aregay who had waged heroic struggle for the liberation of Ethiopia and other notables such as Ato Mekonnen Habte Wold, the Emperor's long time loyal minister who years before was instrumental in the closing down of the Imperial Guard radio programs.

In the aftermath of the 1960 coup, Major Assefa Lemma, an affable person and an accomplished soldier-diplomat, was incensed at what he felt was a cruel betrayal by the Guard of

the Emperor he loved and admired. As a close friend of both Generals Merid Mengesha and Kebede Gebre, he took charge of the Ministry of Information and used the media to galvanise widespread public support for the Emperor.

As the loyalist forces gained strength with reinforcements from officer cadets from Holetta and a battalion from the Third Infantry Regiment at Debre Berhan, General Mengistu and Germame sought sanctuary at a farm near Zuquala, not far from Bishoftu. The rest of the rebel units either dispersed or surrendered to the Army. The Emperor's palace was retaken with the minimum of casualties.

Within the same week both General Mengistu and Germame were found hiding in a farmer's home near Zuquala and in the ensuing exchange of fire, Germame was killed. The General was wounded and captured. A close friend of General Mengistu, Police Commander General Tsige Dibou, was also killed in a shootout in Addis Ababa.

A few months later, General Mengistu was tried publicly by a regime-friendly court and despite his sterling performance at the hearings, where he outlined the reasons for his failed coup attempt, the summary executions in the Green Saloon weighed heavily against him. He was sentenced to death and he refused to appeal. The Emperor approved the court's decision and the General was sent to the gallows before a multitude at Tekle Haymanot Square in Addis.

The 1960 coup attempt against the monarchy was in fact the result of several years of preparation by General Mengistu Neway, his selected and trusted officers like Colonel Worqneh Gebeyehu, Major Yohannes Misikir, Captain Baye Ttilahun, Captain Asrat Deferesu, Lt. Bekele Seggu and young civilian reformists who had completed their studies abroad. The young civilians who were close to General Mengistu included his brother Germame Neway, Lij Michael Emru, Ketema Yifru, Germame Wondafrash, Lemma Frew and others. They were advancing the idea of reforming the regime into a constitutional monarchy in the course of which they hoped to encourage the Emperor to gracefully abdicate in favour of Crown Prince Asfa Wossen.

Captain Getachew, who at that time was seconded to the Military Academy in Harar and was aware of such developments, narrated to me how information on the intentions of the plotters had been unintentionally leaked by Lemma Frew to reach the ears of Ato Mekonnen Habte Wold.

Before he left for the state visit to Brazil, aware of an impending coup, the Emperor was in fact thinking of sacking General Mengistu and appointing another officer to command the Guard. When General Mengistu Neway learnt of this through his secret collaborator Colonel Worqneh, he was forced to launch the coup at least three months too early.

After the coup was foiled, several officers who survived the army onslaught and the few civilians who included Ketema Yifru were detained for a brief period and pardoned

by the Emperor. The families of the victims of the coup, notably Ras Abebe Aregay's aging mother, Woizero Askale Gobena, pleaded with the Emperor to dismantle the force and give total command to the army. In a shrewd move, the Emperor appointed the Late Ras Abebe's son-in law, General Debebe Haile Mariam as the new Commandant but kept the force as a separate regiment largely reinforced by trusted officers selected from the ranks of the army.

Notwithstanding these developments, the seeds for a bigger revolt were yet to be sowed. Years later, a younger Mengistu, then an officer cadet who had just graduated from the Military School in Holetta, was destined to be a principal actor in deposing the Emperor and yet again in the execution of several high-ranking officials.

In 1961, during the long summer recess, I went to Yirgalem Hospital in Sidamo to work as a dresser, plumber, electrician, etc, under the guidance of the Norwegian Director of the hospital, Dr. Tauschoe and his Icelandic general practitioner, Dr. Johansson. Both were fond of me and trained me in basic hospital maintenance and sincerely wanted me to join Medical School, just as my classmate, another childhood friend, the late Dr. Teferra Tizzazu, had done.

That summer job enabled me to buy the obligatory decent suit before I could register for the college semester. It had its cost. One day while assisting Dr. Johansson in the hospital in Yirga Alem, a patient with swollen lips was brought in. He had to have a slit to get the accumulated blood out. When the



doctor slightly pricked his lips, blood came out gushing and I fainted on the spot.

After that incident I knew I was not emotionally ready to become a physician. My Sidamo experience was however most rewarding in the sense that I got to know the beautiful and fertile regions of southern Ethiopia and also met several compatriots of good will whose friendship I have always cherished.

During the summer July in 1961, when it was announced over the national radio that our high school graduation was to be held at the Christmas Hall within the premises of GENNETE LI'UL Palace in Addis, Dr. Tauschoe immediately put me on an early morning bus so that I could join my fellow graduates to receive my certificate from the Emperor.

Our high school graduation was a unique experience with more than four hundred graduates from all over Ethiopia lined up for the occasion before the Emperor. Those who had completed their final exams with distinction were also given pens bearing the Emperor's name besides the certificates. We were all proud and happy young people.

That summer was also the time the Russians gave the world another surprise with their scientific and space exploration. Major Uri Gagarin became the first man in space when he was launched and brought back safely to earth,

clearly influencing several young students to pursue higher education in science and technology.

At the start of the college semester in September, I was enrolled at the science faculty at the University College in Addis Ababa. Mr. Logan, my physics teacher made life difficult for me because he felt I was a bright but, perhaps rightly so, a lazy student. Usually he would give the class surprise tests. One day I would score a hundred percent and on another day twenty percent. That obviously angered him. Simply put, despite my successful first year after several ups and downs, I felt I had a different calling - journalism. I chose to abandon science and join the arts faculty in the new semester.

Although I enjoyed my classes at the science faculty where our very committed Canadian Jesuit instructors, Dean McFarlane, Mr. Rancourt and others were guiding us; the sociology classes given by Professor Shack, an African American, were already attracting several adherents. I asked to be transferred and was permitted to join the Arts Faculty at the start of the new academic year. I was happy with my decision.

Emperor Haile Selassie had established University College of Addis Ababa a decade earlier with the help of a group of Canadian Jesuit priests led by Professor Lucien Matte. Students were provided with brand new dark blue blazers and grey trousers that marked them distinctly from other young persons wherever they went in town. The area

between Arat Kilo and Piazza was literally their undisputed territory. The Emperor would also visit the campus during lent season and offer fruits and other gifts to the students.

The renowned *Maitre Artist*, Afeworq Tekle visited the University College every Wednesday afternoon when there were no lectures and conducted drawing classes for those of us who thought they were artistically inclined. Extra-curricular lectures and debates would also be held in the auditorium with activists and aspiring politicians like Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam and Dr. Berket-Ab Habte Selassie, then a young Attorney General, taking centre stage. Bereket, once an eminent citizen of Ethiopia, joined the Eritrean secessionists after the death of his friend General Aman Michael Andom and served for some time as an adviser of Eritrean separatist leader Isaias Aferworqi. Later on, Dr. Bereket opted to distance himself from the new rulers in Asmara.

In those days, the Students' Council in the University Collage of Addis Ababa had its own first-rate and independent newsletter, "*News and Views*". Yohannes Kifle, Be'alu Girma, Moges Tekle Michael and a few other select groups of senior students edited the weekly bulletin. Haile Fida, who at that time was a senior geology student and later on founder of All Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON) was one of the most seasoned contributors. Besides being a prolific writer, Haile was also among those who attended *Maitre Artist* Afeworq Tekle's Wednesday art classes.

Academic freedom at the College, though affected to a certain extent by the Imperial Guard coup attempt of the previous year was still relatively intact. During General Mengistu Neway's coup attempt, college students had expressed sympathy with the rebels. After the events, however, they were encouraged to apologize to His Imperial Majesty. The Emperor had pronounced his "fatherly" pardon, but he could not forget easily. The students continued with their criticism of the regime through yearly poetry contests on any occasion that presented itself. There was no love lost between Academia and the Crown.

Thus in 1962, while the country was still recovering from the shock of the attempted coup, the Emperor decided to abandon Guenete-L'eul, the "Palace of Princely Paradise" at Sidist Kilo and donated the premises along with the infamous Green Salon, to the new University bearing his name. At the same time all college students were told to vacate their dormitories and look for alternative accommodation in town.

Just as we had responded to the same kind of government instructions in Debre Berhan some three years earlier, this time too we marched to the Grand Palace to plead our case, before the Emperor. Charismatic senior class students who included economist Gebeyehu Firissa, a promising legal scholar Shibru Seifu and an articulate business administration student, Yesus Worq Zafu, led us.

Yesus Worq was severely reprimanded by the Emperor when he tried to reason out that non-residential academic life

would be detrimental to the student community. Later in the year, despite being declared by his faculty the best student of the graduating class, Yesus Worq was not allowed to personally receive his degree from the Emperor like other graduates. Yesus Worq Zafu is now a successful businessman and leader of the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce following his long years of exile during the Derg regime.

In the years that followed our protest march to the Palace in 1961, Addis Ababa University turned into a breeding ground for firebrand revolutionaries like Eshetu Chole, Tilahun Gizaw, Berhane Mesqel Redda and others.

In 1969, an assassin's bullet, allegedly from State Security firearm, claimed Ttilahun Gizaw's life. Berhane Mesqel, who later on led the budding Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) went into exile alongside other revolutionaries to carry on the struggle, first against the Imperial regime, then in 1974 against what he believed was an unholy alliance between Haile Fida's party and the military regime that unleashed the infamous red terror of the seventies. This will be recounted in more detail in later.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Radio Voice Of The Gospel*

At the University one beautiful day in early February 1962 while basking in the morning sunshine, a group of my friends was passing by. They told me they were heading to some place for a part-time job interview so I requested to join them rather than sit alone. I would wait outside till the interview was over.

As we entered the small-improvised radio studio located outside Addis, two Norwegian Lutheran missionaries, the venerable Director, Dr. Sigurd Aske and Pastor Jelsten were giving voice tests. They were looking for an appropriate announcer for a new radio station soon to be set up by the Lutheran World Federation - Radio Voice of the Gospel. The Emperor had granted permission to set up and operate the station six months earlier.

After my friends had taken the voice tests, the younger one, Jelsten, asked: “Why don’t you too try?” On taking the test, it was decided on the spot that I had the appropriate voice. I was then directed to Magnus Manson, the Swedish administrator of the station.

I was pleased to meet Manson again thirty years later at his home in Uppsala, Sweden. I also met, after many years, my high school mentor, Professor Ezra Gebre Medhin and his

wife Genet Aw'alom, who was also my first radio program supervisor.

After that radio voice test in 1962 and my subsequent presentations on the radio, I was paid what was then a princely twenty-five Birr per spot announcement. With my first pay, I hosted a feast for my friends; Teferra Tizzazu, Baro Tumsa, Haile Yesus Aba Asen and Teshome Akale Heywot. It was a lot of money to spend in a day. The Birr was very strong.

In summer, after that brief introduction to broadcast journalism, I landed a full-time announcer's job at what was then a hefty 300 Birr per month. When classes commenced the following September, I concentrated on three things: my studies, the radio part-time job and an evening German language course at the Goethe Institute that had just opened near the University College at Arat Kilo. I made good progress in German under the tutelage of a warm person, Dr. Rolf Rauschenbach and his very able Ethiopian assistant, Dejene Hileteworq.

During our graduation, we received our certificates from Herr von Stupnagel, a young German diplomat who was the third Secretary at the Embassy. He was son of the famous World War II German Army Commander in Paris who had defied Hitler's order to burn down the city. Years later when I was appointed Ambassador of my country to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), he was also appointed Federal Germany's Ambassador to Ethiopia. What a



remarkable coincidence! We both later on served in South Africa as international observers during the first post-apartheid elections - Stupnagel for the European Union and I for the United Nations.

The inauguration by the Emperor of Radio Voice of the Gospel on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1963 was perhaps one of the most important events in my life, as would another event on 26th February 1977 would turn out to be.

During that ceremony in 1963, when Dr. Amanuel Gebre Selassie, a highly respected official of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and Senior Adviser to Director of the Station together with our Administrator Hagos Legesse cued the Emperor to press the “go on air” button and I announced: “This is Radio Voice of the Gospel.” My heart was filled with pride and felt I had made history in my own way.

Dr. Amanuel, who was a British educated lay preacher had already gone through ups and downs in life when his church assigned him the responsibility of assisting in the setting up of Radio Voice of the Gospel. During the Fascist occupation, he and other young educated Ethiopians were dumped for several years in notorious prisons in Italian Somaliland. After Liberation, Dr. Amanuel served first as Supreme Court judge and later as special adviser to the British Embassy before taking up his advisory assignment at Radio Voice of the Gospel.

Our radio broadcasts soon became popular. Mekonnen Demissie, who later became an accomplished lawyer and served with Ethiopian Airlines and UN adviser in Eastern Slovenia, had earlier on joined the Newsroom Team to reinforce our efforts. RVOG newscasts were favoured because the station was relatively free of the notorious Imperial censors and in fact the Emperor himself was our most prominent and regular listener. He would often call Dr. Amanuel to comment favourably on our programs. Those calls from the Palace were on assurance that we had the competitive edge over the national radio and this motivated us to be more creative.

During the early stages of RVOG operations, Tesfaye Tadesse, a native of Mizan Teferi in Jimma Province, had just completed his high school at Kokebe Tsebah Haile Selassie I School in Addis Ababa. When he started working for Radio Ethiopia, his pay was not adequate and even when he was paid; the payday depended on the goodwill of the cashier. He was thus forced to look for better employment and soon joined us. He later on he won a scholarship to study in the United States, first at Ithaca and Columbia Universities and later on at Ann Arbor, Michigan for his graduate studies.

During the opening of the first summit of independent African countries in Addis Ababa in May 1963, radio journalists from Radio Voice of the Gospel were at hand to give live coverage of the proceedings. A team of Radio Ethiopia journalists did a commendable job of providing running commentary on the conference, led by the French-

trained broadcaster, Zewde Retta who was later became Deputy Minister of Information and Ambassador. Zewde Retta retired after a long service in IFAD in Rome and wrote what could perhaps be described as a unique and powerful book on the recent history of Eritrea. He reviewed dispassionately and accurately the historical developments that led to the reunion of the two parts of historical Ethiopia.

At our station, Woizero Alem Seged Hiruy, a British-educated member of the noble Ras Emru family was doing a superb job as English News Reader. Since Ethiopia did not have a TV station then, our British radio news editors, Derek Tipler, Desmond Telfer and Ken Stewart, who had some TV experience before they came to Addis helped in operating a closed circuit TV at the majestic Africa Hall, a conference centre donated to the United Nations by the Emperor only a few years earlier.

1963 was indeed the year of Africa's reawakening. The excitement and expectation created by that Summit among the citizens of Addis Ababa was so much that TV sets had to be placed on podiums at the main square outside Africa Hall for the public to follow the proceedings as famous African leaders addressed the conference. Most African countries had gained independence a few years earlier and it was a sight to behold watching those leaders pompously escorted in and out of the conference centre, a ritual that has been carried over into the new Millennium.

Among the illustrious African dignitaries who had arrived for the debut conference were; Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who confidently predicted that “Africa Shall Rise” and Ben Bella of Algeria who called on all his peers to “die a little for Africa’s total liberation.” There was King Idris of Libya, Presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ben Bella of Algeria, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Milton Obote of Uganda, Nigerian President and Prime Minister Namdi Azikiwe and Sir Abubacar Tafewa Balewa respectively. Others were President and Poet Laureate Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, Ibrahim Aboud of the Sudan, Bourghiba of Tunisia, Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Albert Tsiranana of Madagascar and Milton Margai of Sierra Leone to name but a few. They all had important messages to pass on to the world and indeed to the next generation of Africans. They were great visionaries.

A memorable incident at the Summit was the debate everybody watched on TV between Prime Minister of Ethiopia Aklilu Habte Wold and the First President of Somalia, Aden Abdullah Osman. To the amazement and great disappointment of many Ethiopians who had knew Osman following his several visits to their country prior to Somalia's independence, he accused Ethiopia of having grabbed Somalia's territory, even before Somalia existed as a state.

Prime Minister Aklilu who had served for a long time as Foreign Minister, despite the Emperor’s urging not to respond to the accusations, asked for the floor and responded to the

Somali leader's allegation and in the process gave an extensive history lesson to the gathered Heads of States.

While reminding the Assembly that the purpose of the meeting was to forge unity, Prime Minister Aklilu said the accusations by the Somali President and his delegation was counter-productive. He stressed that Ethiopia literally struggled alone for the liberation of the African continent, including Somalia. If there was any territorial claim to be made, then Ethiopia had the historical right to do so. Meanwhile, in the interest of peace, it would continue to fight for the respecting of existing frontiers in the continent. Tampering with current frontiers would invite more problems, he cautioned.

Earlier, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana had told the eminent gathering that the masses of Africa were crying for unity. The people of Africa, he said, called for the dismantling of the boundaries that kept them apart. He articulated his clarion call for the establishment of "Union Government for Africa" to inspire the youth of the continent.

University students, town folks and journalists had easy access to the African heroes. We were allowed to get their autographs, as security around the Heads of State was not visibly tight and excessively repressive as in latter days. Those were times of innocence.

Besides occasional live coverage of such events and the decidedly balanced daily news that usually preceded readings

from the Bible, Radio Voice of the Gospel's sports program was extremely popular. Immediately after we started regular programs, the leading Ethiopian sports official and life long member of the International Olympic Committee, a famous name in the history of African sports, Yidneqachew Tesemma, had recommended Solomon Tesemma (no relation), to be seconded to our station to prepare sports programs.

Solomon Tesemma, a former non-commissioned officer of the Imperial Body Guard then working for the United States Information Service in Addis Ababa soon became a star and gained more and more adherents for our broadcasts. He had already made a name for himself during the Third Africa Cup Tournament a couple of years earlier that was hosted by Ethiopia under the brilliant organisation of Yidneqachew.

Yidneqachew's epic struggle to unite African sportsmen and women against apartheid and rally governments and people the world over for the fight against racism in international sports will be discussed later.

One day in early February 1964, during an afternoon shift at the radio station, VIPs from Cologne (Köeln), Germany, visited the station. Herr von Bismark, great-grandson of the famous Bismarck and Director of *WEST DEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK* (WDR) had sent them. Dr. Schaeffer led the delegation. Our Program Manager and mentor, Ulrich Fick, introduced them to me. When I spoke to them in my limited

German, they were amused and inquired where I lived in Germany.

I told them I was not so lucky to have ever visited the county but would have loved to visit the land I admired from history books. They extended an invitation to me on the spot and upon their return arranged a scholarship for me to enrol at the University of Cologne with a part-time training at WDR. Three weeks later, I received a letter, signed by Dr. Schaeffer confirming the scholarship grant.

Prior to my departure, our young German studio technician, Francis Walter Lemke, spared time to teach me better spoken and written German. Lemke, who developed his career in London, later on became one of the program directors of Radio Deutsche Welle, the Voice of Germany.

At the University in Addis, I informed our new Dean of Arts Faculty, Israeli Professor Yabetz and his junior Ethiopian counterpart, Dr. Abraham Demoz of my scholarship grant and they gladly wrote the necessary recommendation letters to the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs to help me obtain a passport and exit visa. Luckily, one of my former teachers at Holetta, Tekle Haymanot Abay had by then undergone advanced education in India and returned to join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Head of the Passport Section. He processed my case in a flash!

Dr. Amanuel, the caring friend that he always was, saw me off at Addis Ababa airport on a warm February morning. I arrived the same day in Frankfurt only to be welcomed by a bitter, cold European winter. I could not help but feel despondent at leaving behind such wonderful friends as Dr. Amanuel, his kind wife Woizero Abeba Kifle Egzi and his two wonderful sons Hiruy and Tsega. They all considered me part of the family.

Hiruy grew up to become an accomplished broadcaster and in early 2000, he served as Ethiopia's Ambassador to Germany. In 2006, he joined the Inter Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), to head one of their important programs.

The flight to Germany in 1964 was my first time to travel by air, let alone in a Boeing 720-B. The Ethiopian Airlines plane that took me to Germany was the first one of its kind to roll out of the Boeing factory in Seattle. The development of Ethiopian Airlines over the last sixty years has been phenomenal. Thanks to generations of its dedicated Ethiopian staff who are entirely Ethiopian, making it the pride of Africa.

Although this attribute is claimed by another airline in the continent that is not fully indigenous, Ethiopian Airlines has fittingly taken another branding, "The Spirit of Africa," vibrant, always developing and aiming high. In the new Millennium, the airline entered into a new contract with



Boeing to become among the first recipients of the cutting edge technology - Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

Back in 1964, upon arrival at Frankfurt, I boarded a smaller aircraft for the onward journey to Koeln. Lufthansa's internal networks were not developed then and they were still waiting to take delivery of smaller versions of Boeings.

As I flew on the DC-3 propeller aircraft and looked down from a relatively lower height, I was overwhelmed by the number of cities spread out in an orderly fashion and the immaculately lined up farms and forests all the way between Frankfurt and Koeln. As the day grew darker, the lights on the ground shone brightly as though they were galaxies of stars in cloudless skies above, which I used to look up and admire as a little boy in Holetta.

After the plane landed at Koeln-Wahn airport, my designated host was calling my name as Mr. Shiawl, (unfortunately also mispronouncing it as SHAL) which I found strange because in Ethiopia we are not used to responding to our fathers' names. I could have easily come noticed had he called "Teferra". So I waited and waited until after the last bus had left the terminal grounds at midnight.

As I began to contemplate on what to do in the middle of the night in a strange land, an elderly well-built gentleman approached me and asked what I was waiting for. I told him I was waiting for a Herr von Bismark sent to pick me up from the airport. He looked at me with visible sympathy and in a

typical Koelsch dialect said: “They must have called your name over the loud speaker and you did not respond. Young man, let me take you to town and we shall see!” I thanked my stars and hopped into his brand new Ford Taunus sedan.

On our way to the city centre, I asked him what his profession was and he replied: “*GEPAEKTRAEGER*,” meaning, a luggage carrier. In our terminology it meant a *KOOLI*. I was greatly surprised. I said to myself: “luggage carriers at Addis Airport could barely afford a square meal, let alone a brand new car! Life in Germany must be of a higher standard”.

Upon arrival at the city centre, my benefactor, now aware of who had invited me booked me in Hotel Mondial, close to the West German Radio Station where I spent a very restful night. I woke up to admire the beauty of the hotel perched on the banks of the Rhein River and the wonderful architecture of the Dom - the famous cathedral, right across the street.

After a heavy breakfast that was served in my room, I asked the hotel receptionist to inform the office of Herr Claus von Bismark, the “Intended” (General Manager) and CEO of WDR that I had arrived. They obliged and told me that a taxi was waiting outside to pick me.

I expected a taxi with a clearly marked sign like the ones I had seen at the airport terminal the previous night. An elderly person dressed like a General of the Imperial Ethiopian Body Guard politely opened the hotel entrance

door for me. I was shocked, because I was a simple student and thought he should not have bothered.

The man then sprinted and opened the door of a white Mercedes limousine, like those used by superiors in Imperial Ethiopia. It did not have any markings as I had expected so when I hesitated, he informed me it was indeed a special taxi that had come for me.

Honestly, I thought that “Generals” in Germany were extremely polite, which indeed they are, until I discovered, to my amazement that this particular gentleman was the hotel doorman, only dressed like an Ethiopian Army General.

After meeting Mr. Claus von Bismark and Dr. Schaeffer in their offices, I settled in my apartment on the Wilhelm-Hossdorf Strasse, close to what was then a super modern architecture replacing the war-damaged Severin Bridge that linked the city’s ring roads and span so majestically over the River Rhein.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### *The Koeln Experience*

During my first few months in Koeln, a special language tutor by the name Herr Ludwig had been hired for me. Though an excellent teacher, he never gave me any rest. One day I asked him if I could have some time off on a Sunday to visit the city. “Look, you cannot believe how much they pay me to teach you German. They pay me a lot of money - by the hour and I am a family man who needs to make good money,” he said. I pitied him and decided not to have any day off. After all, I was the one who stood to gain.

After the German language course I earnestly started my studies as a guest student auditor at Koeln, with practical radio journalism training at West Deutscher Rundfunk (WDR). I was under the tutelage of Frau Dr. Brigitte Granzow, who was Director of what was then called the Third Program, KULTURELLES WORT that was dedicated to culture and education mainly.

One day as I was walking to WDR for my training sessions, I met a tall handsome Ethiopian at a tram station near my house. Habte Mariam Assefa was a theology graduate from Athens University who had come to Germany to continue with his studies in Law. His father – Mariam, was a famous wartime resistance leader in Tigray, northern Ethiopia and following his death, Habte began to lead the life of a monk in a Coptic monastery.

The Emperor brought Aba Habte Mariam from Tigray and enrolled him at the Theological Seminary in Addis and later sent him to Greece for further studies. Upon his arrival in Europe and while still in Athens, he decided to abandon the celibate life of a monk and married a vivacious German girl he had met in the Law Faculty at Koeln University. We remained good friends during my stay in Koeln and our friendship continued in Ethiopia.

Dr. Habte Mariam informed me that there were other compatriots residing in Koeln and Bonn. I set out to look for them. I met Dr. Goitom Wolde Mariam, an Economics student who until he joined the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front in the early seventies, was an avowed Ethiopian. After Goitom and I met for the first time at one of the nightclubs in Koeln, we talked almost the whole night on diverse topics, among them his passionate views on the virtues of Ethiopian patriotism.

Later in the summer of that year, Goitom and I travelled together to Bologna, Italy to attend the annual meeting of Ethiopian Students Union in Europe. A printing engineer, Aklilu Yimtatu joined us from Heidelberg. In Bologna, we met future revolutionaries and also made new friends. The most vocal ones during the meeting were those who came from France, like Daniel Tadesse and Negede Gobeze, who later became leading members of Haile Fida's party. Hiruy Tedla Bairu, who had completed college in Addis while I was

a freshman, had also joined us from London where he was doing his postgraduate studies.

Hiruy Tedla is the son of Dejazmatch Tedla Bairu, architect of Ethio-Eritrean unity during the struggle against British trusteeship administration in the former Italian colony. In the late sixties, however, Hiruy joined Osman Saleh Sabbe's Eritrean Liberation Front Revolutionary Command. The Front was weakened after Sabbe's death in the late seventies and the emergence of a stronger Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) under Isaias Afeworqi, a guerrilla leader who knew neither flexibility nor compromises.

In the New Millennium, Hiruy Tedla became a frequent visitor to Addis Ababa, representing part of the Eritrean opposition in exile. Though his father Dejazmatch Tedla Bairu was disgruntled with the way the Emperor treated him in the wake of Eritrea's unity with the Motherland, Hiruy Tedla's dedication as a student, to the cause of Ethiopian unity seemed intact.

The Bologna meeting was a welcome distraction from the daily routine of journalism courses and training in Koeln. At that meeting we elected another latter day Eritrean liberation activist and senior economic adviser to President Isaias, Abraham Kidane as our student leader.

Meanwhile in WDR, I trained in Dr. Granzow's Third Program Department that included news editing, drama production for schools, music program co-ordination and

historical documentaries. It was a journey into the advanced world of learning through electronic media and I was determined to accumulate as much knowledge as I could.

My Deutsche Welle job came by chance when I met, at WDR, Ambassador Assefa Lemma who was serving his first term in Bonn. He was a close family friend of the German Director of Deutsche Welle, Wolfgang Teuscher. Teuscher had the intention to expand the Africa Service of the radio station and being well disposed towards Ethiopia, he was looking for a qualified person to build a team and start an Amharic program. He had heard that I was in WDR and wanted to meet me.

After a brief discussion, I agreed to take up the job and we started a daily fifteen-minute program on March 15th 1965. A few years later, Teuscher, his wife and their little son Oliver were involved in a fatal car accident on the Bonn-Koeln autobahn. Africa and indeed Ethiopia lost a great German friend.

Before I could come to terms with my new job at Deutsche Welle, Ambassador Assefa was recalled to Addis to become the Minister for Mines. We missed him very much because he was supportive of all our efforts to develop good programs for our audience in Ethiopia. He cared less about protocol. He was a hands-on person, always warm and caring and daring. My good luck brought us together again in 1969 when he was sent to Bonn for his second tour of duty.



Ambassador Assefa's successor was Dejazmatch Amaha Aberra, an eccentric individual and son of the famous Ethiopian Patriot Dejazmatch Aberra Kassa. He had graduated in London as an economist. Amaha could not really find his niche in the web of imperial court intrigues in Addis and was assisted by Dr. Eguale, a German-educated Counsellor of the Embassy. He rarely spent time in Bonn. Instead, he preferred to live in London or Geneva, most of the time following up on a project the Emperor had initiated and mandated German architects to design - a plan for Bahar Dar as the future capital of Ethiopia.

On the few occasions he spared for his duties in Bonn, Dejazmatch Amaha would call students to his office, inquire about their backgrounds and meticulously enter the data in his special notebook. On one such occasion, he summoned me to his office and when I told him my grandfather's name was Kidanekal, originally from Debre Berhan, he noted all the details and looked at me straight in the eyes. He then folded his notebook. Since then, he had a soft spot for me and always included me in all official functions. I later learnt from Ambassador Zewde Haile Mariam that my grandfather had loyally served Amah's family in earlier years.

As soon as I started organising the Amharic Program of Deutsche Welle, I encouraged Goitom and the other compatriots I met in Koeln; Bogale Mekuria, Deragon Haile Meleket, Alula Abate and Bekele Demissie to join me as radio program officers and translators. Afterwards Frank Lemke joined us after terminating his services in Addis.

The Deutsche Welle Amharic service soon, became very popular and attracted many listeners and I felt I had accomplished another “first” in my life. Negussie Mengesha, a young sharp journalist who later joined the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Party (EPRP), was also brought in as program editor with Lemke serving as coordinator.

Negussie had left his job at Radio Voice of the Gospel in Addis, when Ulrich Fick and I recommended him for an apprenticeship at WDR. We were also lucky to have, for our women’s programs, Mulatua Haile Selassie - a brilliant young lady trained in the United States that was serving as Public Relations officer at the Ethiopian Tourism Commission. Besides her natural gift, Habte Selassie Tafesse a tireless advocate and developer of Tourism in Ethiopia had trained Mulatua very well.

Mulatua eventually left Deutsche Welle after getting married to a young lawyer and astute diplomat, Dr. Berhane Gebray. Dr. Berhane had done his post-graduate studies in France while Mulatua was in Koeln. Thus, Netsanet Asfaw, whom I knew when she was a senior student at the University College in Addis Ababa and whose brother Tirfu studied with me in Debre Zeit, then serving as program producer in Radio Ethiopia, succeeded Mulatua. Later on Netsanet joined the armed struggle against the Derg and returned to Addis Ababa in 1991 with the victorious forces of EPRDF to eventually become an MP and Minister.

Although Negussie, had to abandon EPRP and immigrate to the US, he was among Ethiopians in the Diaspora who were instrumental in waging a scathing media campaign to dismantle the military regime in Addis Ababa. His regular radio programs in the eighties and nineties through Voice of America from Washington, D.C. attracted a large audience.

Back in the 1960s, life in Germany for foreign students, particularly Ethiopians, was at its most convenient. Emperor Haile Selassie, who earlier in 1954 had paid his first state visit to the newly created Federal Republic of Germany and the stunning marathon victory of the bare footed Abebe Biqila, at the Rome Olympics in 1960 had left their positive imprint in the minds of Germans.

Ethiopians were warmly welcomed everywhere they went and they did not need a visa those days. What a contrast to the situation of later years, where German Police and their Shepherd dogs awaited disembarking Ethiopians and suspiciously interrogating them upon arrival at German airports was a common sight!

During the carnival season that always followed the end of winter, Koeln, a happy city even at normal times turned into a merry-making and fun loving circus. Women would freely and unashamedly provoke young men. They considered kissing any stranger in public an adventure during the three mad days, *DIE DREI DOLLEN TAGEN*. It must be a carry-over from, old pagan traditions. Young foreign students were easy prey of such advances by a happy Koeln citizenry.

Besides our regular training programs, Ethiopian students in Europe were given opportunities to participate in seminars and workshops organised in other European centres. One such occasion was when a US-sponsored workshop was organised in Utrecht, Holland and early 1966 for a dozen or so Ethiopian student leaders.

In Utrecht, I and my long-time friends; Dr. Fitigu Tadesse from Strasbourg, Dr. Dawit Zawde from Moscow, my former college mates from the University College in Addis Ababa, Hirut Befeqadu and Dr. Ayalew Assaye who were at that time studying in Italy. Dr. Fiqre Merid from Paris brainstormed about the possible scenarios that would follow the eventual demise of the imperial regime in Ethiopia.

Though the Americans were far ahead in their analysis, they were not immediately impressed with our guarded conclusion about the likelihood of a left-wing military dictatorship emerging in Ethiopia. I learnt many years later that they had finally come to the same conclusion and had even advised the aging Emperor to abdicate the throne in favour of the Crown Prince who would then be a constitutional monarch. The Emperor would hear none of that.

Hirut Befeqadu, the only girl in the group, later on served as the Information Officer of the Organization of African Unity, until she retired after more than thirty years of service. Fitigu, rose to be Vice President of the Hunger Project in

New York, still retained his good sense of humour. We all have continued to develop our relationship in good and bad times.

My work and training in Germany during the sixties opened wider opportunities for me to know the country and its people well. I could never get tired of studying German history, literature and culture. I watched the economic miracle unfold unabated. Unemployment rate was in the minus figures. Thus, labour had to be imported. Italians, Spaniards and Turks constituted the bulk of guest workers, *GASTARBEITER*, as Germans liked to refer to them.

In the late sixties, the development of a culture of veritable democracy in Germany was in full swing. I watched with fascination the Bundestag debates in Bonn. Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, father of post-war German economic miracle and other master politicians of the day, Fritz Erler, Herbert Wehner, Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, Erich Mende, Walter Scheel, and the Bavarian leader Franz Joseph Strauss enlivened the debates. Listening to those sometimes-hot debates from the public gallery of the Bundestag began to shape my political outlook in favour of social democracy.

Whenever the opportunity rendered itself, I crisscrossed the country to visit famous historical sites. The Federal Press Office even facilitated for me and for other foreign students guided tours of the divided Berlin, a city that won our total sympathy. I was often dispatched to the airport as one of the young journalists to interview Federal President Heinrich

Luebke when he returned from visits to Africa. Life could never be boring.

On weekends and holidays, Dr Schaeffer and his wife Barbara would invite me to their home in the suburbs of Koeln and I took pleasure in taking care of their little baby Melina to allow the couple to visit the theatre or cinema. Melina grew up to become an accomplished physician.

While undertaking my journalism training in Koeln, I also successfully completed a parallel journalism course via distant education from Benet College in Sheffield, England and received my diploma in June 1965. I was intent on continuing my education under any circumstances.

In the summer of 1966, Dr. Aske, the Director of Radio Voice of the Gospel, invited me to visit him at his home in Narvik outside Oslo. He proposed that I return to Ethiopia and take over the management of the news programs in RVOG once I finished my training programs in Koeln. I counter proposed by suggesting that since my English had gone a bit rusty at the expense of my German, I should first be given the opportunity train at Reuters News Agency or BBC in London to polish my English. He agreed.

I left Negussie Mengesha, Mulatua, Goitom, Bogale, Bekele Demissie, Deragon, Tamru Hampo and Dr. Alula Abate to continue with the Amharic program and headed for London.

A few years later, Goitom, whose brother had given his life fighting against Italians for Ethiopia's liberation, and Deragon, whose father Ras Haile Melekot was one of the few Ethiopian noblemen respected and loved by the Emperor, ended up as senior advisers to Eritrean secessionist leader Isaias Afeworqi.

I arrived in London on December 1, 1966 on a grey and cold morning and proceeded to Reuters Head Office on Fleet Street. There, a senior editor, Bruce Russell, welcomed me and sent me to a Lutheran hostel in Pembridge Gardens to settle down and freshen up prior to my intensive training. Dr. Aske had made meticulous arrangements for my comfortable stay in Britain. Soon I learnt the different techniques of reporting, editing and filing stories, giving me a good feeling of the Fleet Street spirit.

After my one-month stint at Reuters, I joined BBC Africa Service at Bush House. There, I met Graham Tyre, a Jewish Brit who doubled as a freelance newsreader at Voice of the Gospel in Addis during his teaching days at Prince Mekonnen School in the sixties. He was now a senior manager of BBC Africa programs.

Graham Tyre included me in the team that prepared Focus on Africa program, which has remained popular to date. There, I met and worked with famous announcers of the time including Alex Teteh Lateh of Ghana, Abdulahi Haji, a former radio Ethiopia Somali Program announcer who had preceded me as trainee in WDR and other seasoned

broadcasters. I also met producers of *Radio Newsreel*, *From Our Own Correspondents* and BBC drama programs in Broadcasting House at Portland Place.

My final stopover for the three-month training was BBC Television at Alexandra Palace in Kilburn, North London where I was taught television news programming. English language news presentation training was organized specifically for me to help develop the skills that Dr. Aske had wanted me to acquire.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Journalism, a Continuous School*

After my return to Voice of the Gospel in 1966 our English and Amharic news programs were expanded and grew very popular. The then Vice Minister of Information and a few years later a prison mate, Ato Negussie Habte Wold, was happy to engage me as a part-time Television announcer. As I wished, my English that had suffered at the expense of my German had improved and I felt I was communicating effectively.

I was always encouraged by the generous comments from the then Minister of Information and later on Foreign Minister, Dr. Menassie Haile who liked my English news presentations. I still keep as souvenir my first continuity announcements on BBC Africa service and the news clippings of thirty years back about the Horn of Africa. Sadly and in retrospect, those stories were no different in nature and content than those of today. Indeed it is only the actors on the world stage that have changed.

While in London, I also completed my journalism distant education courses from Benet College, in Sheffield, and, earned a diploma. Even then I could also spare time to meet Ethiopian students in London and Ethiopian army cadets at nearby Sand Hurst. Hiruy Tedla and members of the Ethiopian community would meet us at Zetland Pub in South

Kensington, a popular joint for Ethiopians, Somalis and Sudanese.

Another interesting feature of London to me at that time was listening to the free political speeches at the Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park near the Marble Arch tube station. I watched and enjoyed what I saw of freedom of speech where even the Queen was not spared of criticism. I thought that was a political and social safety valve whose usefulness has been lost to dictators in other parts of the world. On two occasions I was assigned along with other colleagues to cover press conferences given by the Prime Minister Harold Wilson and opposition leader Edward Heath at their respective party headquarters.

I was astounded at the way British journalists would freely pose questions to the leaders even if they knew about the discomfort their questions would cause to the interlocutors. In Ethiopia no journalist would dare pose critical questions to ministers, let alone to His Imperial Majesty.

Colleagues at the BBC and Reuters were helpful in many ways thereby making my brief stay in London fruitful and memorable. My admiration of the British tradition of freedom and democracy was reinforced during my apprenticeship. I always spared time to visit Hyde Park whenever I visited London in the years that followed.

I returned home after wrapping up my training in the UK at the end of November 1966. Dr. Amanuel was again at the

airport to welcome me and he whisked me through immigration and customs. He then drove me to Radio Voice of the Gospel compound and the ever-gracious Woizero Abeba Kifle-Egzi was there to extend to me her characteristically warm hospitality.

In my new capacity as a news manager, I was entitled to an advance loan to buy a new car and arrangements were made with the agents of Volkswagen for me to purchase a VW beetle. Those days a brand new one cost USD 3000 (Birr 7500). The workhorse served me for several years till I sold it to one lucky fellow at a reasonable price. Cars last long in the ideal Ethiopian weather because of the ingenuity of Ethiopian maintenance technicians. Forty years down the road, I still see my old car on the road and if the owner sold it in 2008, it would fetch five to ten times as much.

Our work in the newsroom had its advantages. I do not remember any public function I was not invited to. Major Assefa Lemma Ethiopia's former Ambassador to Germany who had in the meantime taken the Mining and Energy portfolio got me in touch with several other personalities, thus widening my contacts and networks. I was learning to cultivate the right friendships.

In the process, I got to know closely Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru, his successor Dr. Menassie Haile, General Kebede Gebre, Bitwoded Asfaha Wolde Michael, Ato Yidneqachew Tesemma and others. These were all great fans and supportive of Radio Voice of the Gospel. We were also

encouraged by the feedback we got from various parts of the world, thanks to the diligence of our Audience Research Coordinator, Menkir Isaias.

In those days, the War in Vietnam was an unending saga, and, American politics were inextricably linked to the events in Indo-China. We reported extensively on the exploits of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army that was led by the Dien Bien Fu hero, General Giap, with Ho Chi Minh giving the ideological guidance. I met General Giap, a diminutive figure, twenty years later in the early eighties when he came to visit Socialist Ethiopia during President Mengistu's regime.

Apart from the major events that related to the successful mediation efforts of the Emperor during the Algeria-Morocco war, the Civil Rights Movement in the US under the leadership of Martin Luther king, the anti-apartheid struggle, the Nigerian Civil War, the Biafran War, as it was called then, and Ian Smith's Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence, UDI, also featured prominently in our current affairs programmes.

On the early morning of August 20, 1968, while on the news-editing shift, the teleprinters went wild with breaking news that Warsaw Pact tanks, led by Soviet commanders had rolled into Czechoslovakia during the night and occupied the peaceful country in an attempt to bring to an end what was then called the "Prague Spring"- the abortive democratic reform movement of the sixties. Charismatic Prime Minister

Alexander Dubcek and President Svoboda had been arrested, handcuffed and carted to Moscow. The entire world condemned the attack and we at Radio Voice of the Gospel had voice clippings of Alexander Dubcek from earlier days that made my morning newscast livelier and more dramatic.

On following day, celebrated Ethiopian Editor in Chief of the Ethiopian Herald, Tegegne Yetesha Worq signed an editorial stating: “Czech Freedom Checked!” There was an outpouring of sympathy in many parts of the world for and in solidarity with the unfortunate Czechs and Slovaks.

The two Czechoslovak leaders were soon released and shipped back to Prague, though Dubcek was sacrificed and replaced by a staunch Soviet loyalist Gustav Hussak. The same Gustav Hussak received me in audience at the Prague Castle twenty-five years later in 1980 when the Derg’s then Foreign Relations chief Major Berhanu Bayih and I visited Czechoslovakia.

I met Alexander Dubcek in 1990 soon after I took up my duties as Ambassador in Prague. As President of Parliament elected in the wake of the Velvet Revolution, Dubcek lived in the posh diplomatic neighbourhood not far from the Prague Castle.

He was my immediate neighbour and since he spoke German, we got to know each other well during our morning walks. I always told him that I was glad he lived to see the demise of Soviet hegemony over Eastern and Central Europe.

He retired from his last job after I left Prague and led a quiet life until his death in an accident on September 1, 1992.

Back in the sixties, during my news broadcasting days, I often used the style of introducing the voice of the principal character in the breaking news just as I did with the Czechoslovakia case. When the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis Tennessee on April 4, 1968, an audio clipping of Dr. King's powerful and eloquent speech "I have a Dream" of August 28, 1963 was useful in spicing up the program.

Dr. King's stirring call-to-action defined the moral basis of the Civil Rights Movement in America and indeed reinforced the struggle for equality and justice all over the world. That kind of news presentation gave us the competitive edge over State-run Radio Ethiopia.

After the Algeria-Morocco crisis where the Emperor was successful at brokering peace and his unreserved effort to bring peace to Nigeria, His majesty's admirers and supporters considered him a likely candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. That was not to be.

The Nigerian Federal Military Chief of State General Yakubu Gowon and the breakaway Biafran leader Colonel Ojukwu, both charismatic officers of British mould, frequented Addis Ababa for their protracted negotiations. Ojukwu was a formidable orator, but General Gowon had the

support of his African peers, as secession was taboo for all of them.

In the sixties, almost all leaders of independent African states and other world leaders honoured Ethiopia and her Emperor with their visits. Queen Elizabeth of Britain and the Duke of Edinburgh; Queen Juliana of the Netherlands and her Spouse Prince Barnard; The Shah of Iran and his pretty wife Queen Farah Diba; President Charles De Gaulle his successor President Georges Pompidou; President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya; British Prime Minister Harold Wilson; United States' Vice President Hubert Humphrey; King Olav of Norway and a host of statesmen from Eastern and western Europe were Ethiopia's honoured guests. These visits and the events that led to the final victory of the Nigerian Federal Government over Biafran cessation provided interesting news material for us newsmen.

There were other visits by among others Aba Iban, the firebrand Israeli Foreign Minister whom I had the privilege of interviewing for radio Voice of the Gospel in the wake of the Six-day war in 1967 with Egypt and Arab states. Mr. Iban impressed us when, at the United Nations, he eloquently defended the Jewish State's right to exist as a sovereign entity.

An interesting aspect of Ethiopia's relations with the United States was the Emperor's yearly visit to America since the days of Eisenhower. In contrast, despite the very close relations of over one hundred years, no sitting US President

ever paid a visit to Ethiopia. Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey were Vice-Presidents when they visited Ethiopia. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton did so when out of Office on humanitarian missions.

The Lutheran World Federation that owned and operated RVOG was a staunch supporter of the anti-apartheid struggle and offered tangible assistance to the oppressed churches in southern Africa. Radio Voice of the Gospel remained its strong arm until a military government bent on nationalising even the smallest of private enterprises and petty retail shops nationalised Radio Voice of the Gospel in 1977.

Work at Radio Voice of the Gospel provided the staff with opportunities to travel widely particularly within Ethiopia in our efforts to prepare varied programs that would entertain and at the same time educate our audience. In the process, during our tour of central and northern Ethiopia with my colleagues Mebrhatu, Mekonnen Demissie and Frank Lemke, we crisscrossed the provinces of Shoa, Wello, Tigray, Eritrea, Bege Meder and Gojam where we sampled the various treasures of our country and learnt from the rich history that was narrated to us on the spot.

We saw what Italian colonialism left behind in Eritrea. In Tigray we climbed the hills of Adwa where Italy was roundly defeated by the forces of Emperor Menelik II in the eighteen eighties. We also saw the site where obelisks were erected in Axum in ancient times and for want of glory, the Italians, in



their second attempt at subjugating Ethiopia forty years later in 1928, had looted one of the tallest obelisks.

The Axum obelisk was returned to Ethiopia in 2007 after a protracted political and diplomatic struggle. Much to the shame of post-war Italy and to the anger of Ethiopians, the looted Ethiopian obelisk was displayed in front of the former colonial office in Rome for over fifty years.

While RVOG lasted as an independent radio station, we had many pleasant moments. Immediately upon my return from London in 1966, we had engaged a number of young journalists and trained them to take over several programmes. Bete Mengistu, Teshome Teklu, Zewdu Tadesse, Getachew Haile Mariam and Negussie Desta were recruited. All of them were without match in their chosen fields. Zewdu, with his self-inflicting jokes was perhaps the best entertainer of the group. Dr. Bete later on became a lay religious leader and now runs civil society organizations in Ethiopia and Kenya.

For journalists in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, the annual summits of the OAU, the successes of our Olympic athletes such as those of Abebe Biqila, Mamo Wolde and others as well as the surprise cabinet re-shuffles (SHUM SHIR) that the Emperor ‘graciously’ carried out provided enough material. Imperial media portrayed events in the renegade province of Eritrea as Arab expansionism and intrusion, particularly by Syria and Iraq.

Iraq and Syria stood out among members of the Arab League harbouring and overtly training Eritrean secessionist elements. Their widely distributed Map of the Arab World included Eritrea and clearly betrayed their intentions. Several years later, an Iraqi diplomat who had served at the same time as me in Berlin was to admit privately that Iraq, under its successive regimes, had spent hundreds of millions of US Dollars of its oil money to finance the guerrilla war for the dismemberment of Eritrea from Ethiopia.

In those days, however, as we travelled all over Eritrea to gather material for preparing radio documentaries and other programmes, the loyalty of the people to the cause of a united Ethiopia never came into question. They knew that they stood to gain from the union. Indeed they were favoured over other provinces by the Emperor when it came to opening new schools, hospitals and even the allocation of senior federal government positions. However, year after year, with unceasing Arab propaganda and support from quarters that resented Ethiopia due its emerging position in Africa and the Imperial regime's poor handling of internal conflicts, pro-Ethiopian sentiments began to erode gradually.

The non-use of Tigrigna in Eritrean schools, the appointment of non-Eritreans to key administrative positions within the province, the dissolution of the Federation and the propaganda from the Arab world, all contributed to the growth of resistance. Cairo Radio was in the forefront in offering free airtime to the likes of long-time exile and

dissident Wolde Ab Wolde Mariam. The resistance bred reprisals. Another die was cast.

The actions by the Imperial regime and its successor, the Derg to subdue the resistance in Eritrea by sheer force accelerated Eritrea's tragic separation, reversing the process of unity that many had supported during the sixty years of colonial domination of Ethiopia's maritime province. Recognition of the rights of the people of Eritrea to determine their own future would have perhaps saved the hundreds and thousands of lives and enormous property lost during the protracted struggle. Geopolitics had also its share, of course.

Thus, while secessionist guerrillas within the country continued with their intermittent attacks on undefended Eritrean villages and on rural outposts of the Ethiopian Army, others abroad began tactics of intimidation with terrorist attacks on civilian Ethiopian air transportation.

One such incident took place in 1969, when Eritrean separatist terrorists launched a grenade attack on a Boeing 707 passenger plane belonging to Ethiopian Airlines while it was parked at Frankfurt Airport. Fortunately no passengers were hurt. To some not so learned fellow countrymen unfamiliar with the aircraft, the news in its Amharic version sounded as if seven hundred and seven Boeing jet planes of the national airline had been hit and the masses simply could not control their anger until the announcements of the news was specifically precise in stating that it was one plane, a Boeing 707, that was the target of the attack.

German and other European media commentators of the time were quick to put the whole blame on the Ethiopian government, accusing it of oppressing the province of Eritrea. Instead of also condemning the terrorist attack for what it was, they utterly failed to present a balanced picture of the situation that obtained in province.

In later years as the problem of airline hijacking and aviation terrorism escalated, the same quarters sang a different song. In the sixties and after Palestinian Fedayeen and their Eritrean separatist disciples made several attempts to disrupt international civil air transportation until they were effectively controlled and dealt with by well-trained anti-hijackers. This reminded me of what I read about Emperor Haile Selassie's plea at the League of Nations in Geneva, a plea for deliverance from Italian fascist aggression long before I was born. "It is us today, it will be you tomorrow".

In the wake of the attack on the Ethiopian civilian aircraft, the then Ethiopian Foreign Minister, Ketema Yifru, had received disturbing reports from Bonn on the hostile press. He thus called me to his office one morning and suggested that since I had studied journalism in Germany and spoke the language, I should be prepared to go to Bonn as Press Secretary and Spokesperson of the Embassy.

Ato Ketema was a sharp thinker and easily approachable, always full of humour. He exuded great confidence. This characteristic was typical even when fifteen years later we

were both political prisoners of the Derg in the cellars of the Grand Palace.

At that time, despite the big cut in salary I knew I would have to endure, it did not take long for Ato Ketema to convince me to leave Radio Voice of the Gospel immediately and take up a new career. I felt that was an honour and provided me with the opportunity to serve my country in a challenging new field, diplomacy. Dr. Tesfaye Gebre-Egzi, the dynamic deputy to Ato Ketema finalized the administrative part without delay. Dr. Tesfaye was an outstanding diplomat who during the revolution became a victim of the mass execution perpetrated by the Derg.



## CHAPTER SIX

### *Into The Diplomatic Service-Assignment In Germany*

As was customary in those days, the letter of appointment as His Imperial Majesty's Second Secretary of Embassy had to come from the Ministry of Pen in the Palace and Dr. Tesfaye Gebre Egzi, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs processed the formalities.

Apparently Major Assefa Lemma, his deputy Ato Teshome Gebre Mariam and his friend Bitwoded Asfaha initially nominated Ambassador to Germany had all proposed my name to Ato Ketema. As destiny would have it, shortly thereafter, Bitwoded Asfaha was appointed Crown Counsellor and remained in Addis Ababa, close to the Emperor. Instead, Major Assefa Lemma was appointed Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany for a second tour of duty.

I was soon dispatched to Bonn to take up my new post. I arrived there in November 1969 as Willy Brandt's Social Democratic Party took power after winning the parliamentary elections that fall. They replaced the Christian Democrats who had reigned since the founding of the Federal Republic. Dr. Eguale, by then elevated to the rank of a Counsellor of the Ethiopian Embassy, knew me very well as a student and gave me a good start in my new diplomatic life. A few months later, Ambassador Assefa returned to Bonn and assumed his responsibilities.

His wife, Woizero Senedu Gebru, who was by her own right already a prominent public figure in Ethiopia, was subsequently named Educational Attaché for all of Europe, based in Bonn. After liberation from Italian occupation and her return from the Italian prison island of Azinara, Woizero Senedu had served first as Director of Empress Mennen Girls' School in the capital and later as the first woman Vice-President the Ethiopian parliament.

In 2006 Woizero Senedu Gebru, at the advanced age of ninety, was awarded the degree of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa*, by Addis Ababa University, the leading academic institution in the Country. Dr. Senedu became the first woman public figure to be honoured with such an award.

Major Assefa had left army service in the early fifties to take up various civil service assignments and also head the Liaison Office at Sinclair Company that was prospecting for oil in the Ogaden region. His first diplomatic appointment was as Ethiopia's Consul General in Aden, then a British colony. He was self-taught, admired and liked for his open-mindedness, the warmth of his heart, his considerate and disarmingly humane nature and his constant effort at helping younger technocrats to become good professional diplomats.

Ambassador Assefa's youngest son, Samuel, who considered his father as role model, was appointed on merit in 2005 as Ethiopia's Ambassador to Washington, which was considered in Ethiopian circles as the most demanding



assignment for any Ethiopian diplomat. He had already served as Vice-President of Addis Ababa University.

A member of Phi Beta Kappa, Samuel earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and economics from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. After earning his doctorate in political science at Princeton University, he taught at Williams College and Rutgers University and later at Addis Ababa University.

Ambassador Assefa lived in exile in Bonn until he died of cancer in 1988. He would have been very proud of his son and his other disciples had he lived to see their success. In the course of my duties in Bonn, I learnt a lot from both Ambassador Assefa and his illustrious wife Woizero Senedu Gebru.

A year before I left for my new posting in Bonn, in the summer of 1968, I had met a very shy and lovely girl, Woineshet Kebede, daughter of Colonel Kebede Wagaye, the army officer who convinced General Assefa Ayene to join the loyalists during the 1960 coup attempt.

Woineshet and I then began to date steadily while she was still in her senior class at the Bible Academy in Nazareth and our relationship grew closer until we both believed it was the right time to marry.

Eventually Woineshet and I made our courtship official and her younger brothers Yoseph, Binyam and Daniel joined us in the conspiracy to let her entire family know about our intention to marry on June 19, 1969; a well-kept secret until then. Her father had by then reached the rank of Brigadier-General and was deputy to the Force Commander of the Imperial Guard.

We both felt we could not simply elope and run away to Bonn. So, as tradition dictated, I had to send elders to convince the Brigadier to give me his daughter's hand. Bitwoded Asfaha and Major Assefa came to my rescue. When I revealed to them my intention, they were delighted to help me out and went to General Kebede and politely informed him that his daughter and I had already agreed to marry.

Bitwoded Asfaha and Ambassador Assefa sought the Brigadier's gracious approval for our marriage to take place soon. They told him who I was and perhaps ascribed to me some good virtues that I was not aware of. He was happy to approve.

A signing ceremony at the Addis Ababa City Hall took place with Bitwoded Asfaha and Major Assefa on my side and Generals Debebe Haile Mariam and Dresse Dubale, both close friends of Brigadier Kebede, on the bride's side standing in as fathers of the bride and groom.

A quick reception was given at the then brand new Wabe Shebelle Hotel followed by another one at my residence where Captain Getachew, Hirut Befeqadu, young Hiruy Amanuel, together with my Radio Voice of the Gospel colleagues Negussie Mengesha, Teshome Teklu, Zewdu Tadesse, Yohannes Irena and Fitsum Berhan Tedla were in attendance.

Woineshet and I then flew off to Bonn to start a new life. She has remained my support in good and bad times, and in all the years of marriage since 1969, we have considered ourselves as a lucky couple. Together we have brought to the world three wonderful sons, Marcos, Henok and Ashenafi.

After I took up my new assignment in Bonn, I continued with my distant education, this time a Law degree course from La Salle Extension University in Chicago Illinois, which I successfully completed in 1972. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot had by then completed his studies in the United States.

During that same year, Tesfaye came for an extended visit to Europe before heading back home. We felt that that his visit to Germany was too short but kept regular contact after he joined the Development Bank of Ethiopia as Public Affairs Officer and later on moved to Addis Ababa Cement Factory as Chief Executive Officer.

Our first son, Marcos Teferra was born on the sunny day of August 6, 1970 in a private clinic on the banks of the

Rhein River at Bad Godesberg. Woizero Senedu ensured that Woineshet was comfortable after she left the maternity ward. As he grew up, Marcos became the favourite baby with the small Ethiopian community in Bonn.

Ambassador Assefa Lemma, Woizero Senedu, their sons Samuel and Daniel, their daughters Gohalem and Meskerem and Dr. Eguale and his successor, another seasoned intellectual Girma Alemu, a graduate of Indiana University, all loved and cared for Marcos.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Munich Olympics – Fighting Racism*

My duties in Bonn were not limited only to press work. I was assigned to serve as the Ambassador's official interpreter, political analyst and Olympic attaché for the games that were to take place in Munich in 1972. My contact with Ato Yidneqachew Tesemma, who kindly gave me the opportunity to serve in the promotion of Ethiopian Olympic efforts, intensified henceforth and we remained close friends until his death 1989. Among his ten children, his daughter Tamirnesh and his son Tadele remained my very close friends.

During the Munich Games, apart from the quest for medals, the African struggle for the elimination of racism from sports was intense. Commissioner Yidneqachew, supported by the indefatigable Ambassador Assefa Lemma led a fierce campaign at Munich. He fought hard, assisted by a Congolese lawyer Kamanda WA Kamanda who was sent by the OAU to intensify the effort. I served as media coordinator.

Ato Yidneqachew and I filled the pages of the local tabloids and other media with interviews we readily gave in which we made no secret of our threats to mobilize the total boycott of the games by all African and African American athletes, unless the all-white team from the breakaway Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith was banned from Munich.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Ato Yidneqachew and the brilliant behind-the-scenes work of Fiqru Kidane, then consultant to the Olympic Committee, we succeeded in keeping white minority-ruled Rhodesia out. Once we won our battle, a flood of hate mail from racist and right wing circles in Germany was circulated but this did not bother us.

Yidneqachew Tessema's steadfast struggle against apartheid and racism was characterised by the stand he took when the apartheid regime wanted to lure him to visit South Africa during the early seventies. They claimed his visit would enable him to see for himself blacks and whites playing in the same teams. He responded that racial discrimination in sports could only be fully achieved only when racial discrimination and apartheid were completely eradicated from all other activities in that country. In fact he was instrumental in the exclusion of South Africa from the Mexico Olympics four years earlier.

As a disciple of Yidneqachew, Fiqru Kidane later served as senior public relations officer of the International Olympic Committee Secretariat in Lausanne. He was also Secretary General of "Olympic Truce", a Task Force organized under UN auspices to coordinate ceasefire arrangements in conflict regions for the duration of Olympic events.

In Munich, despite the tragic killings of Israeli athletes by a Palestinian terrorist group and the ensuing confusion that was created in the Olympic village during the games, the

programmes commenced as scheduled, shortly after that fateful night in 1972.

On the athletics front, the hero of the Mexico Olympics marathon, Mamo Wolde, watched by his role model, double marathon hero Abebe Biqila from the Honour Tribune of the Stadium had managed only a bronze medal. The great sportsman that he was, he took his third place gracefully.

Another young Ethiopian runner, Miruts Yifter, also took the bronze in the 10,000m and did not compete in his 5000m specialties, largely due to the confusion with his team coaches who had evidently arrived late to guide him to the tracks. By the time they took him to the race marshals, the race had already started. Solomon Tesemma and I jumped from the podium where we were sitting to see if we could find Miruts. The coaches, Negussie Roba and Wolde Mesqel Qostre had preceded us and their belated effort was in vain.

When Miruts returned to Ethiopia after the Games, some angry local officials accused him of deliberately failing to compete and had him placed in temporary confinement. Miruts spent some time away from public view instead of receiving plaudits for his medal.

Undeterred, Miruts continued training and his great moment came during the Olympics Games in Moscow in 1980. With the world watching on, he finally delivered the ultimate tactical blow that stunned his challengers. His tactics gave him the nickname “Yifter the Shifter” after he

accelerated the pace with 300m remaining - a trademark of that legendary athlete later on emulated by fine athletes such as Haile Gebre Selassie, Derartu Tulu, Kenenissa Bekele, Berhane Adere, Messeret Defar, Ttirunesh Dibaba, Gette Wami, Sileshi Sihine and others who succeeded him. In the years that followed, Dr. Wolde Mesqel proved to be a great trainer. His efforts were crowned with repeated successes.

For me and for my family, the Munich games provided us with the opportunity to meet legendry film stars we had always admired like Sidney Poitier and Gina Lolobrigida who were guests of honour. I was very happy to part with my Ethiopian flag pin of the National Olympic Committee when Sydney asked for it. I could not find a better advertiser for the Ethiopian Olympic Team.

A year after the Munich Olympics in the summer of 1973, Emperor Haile Selassie arrived in Stuttgart for his last visit to Germany. He was accorded a warm welcome befitting an old friend of Germany and Emperor of an ancient land.

Although reports were circulating about the famine in Wello, the issue was not raised at any of the Emperor's meetings with President Heinemann, Foreign Minister Walter Scheel and other German officials. On his return to Addis, he was gracious to give us a place in his aircraft for a trip for our annual vacation in Ethiopia. Since he loved little children, he took our son, Marcos on his lap and spent some good moments with him during the flight.



During that flight, the pilot must have erroneously touched some stress signal button that relayed the wrong message to ground control towers in Europe, and BBC was quick to report wrongly that the Emperor's plane was hijacked. As we arrived in Addis, an apprehensive crowd awaited us and we heard the details in amazement only after settling in our homes. Naraian Eswaran, a quick-witted Indian-born assistant to Dr. Menassie later mocked the BBC with a popular Ethiopian saying: "A Hyena in a hurry bites at the horn of its prey". It sounded good when he said it with his Indian accent.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *My Observations on Libya*

In 1973, as preparations were underway for the annual tenth summit of Heads of State of the OAU, I had to interrupt my vacation and return to my post in Bonn since an important task awaited me. Ambassador Assefa had got hold of a document from the German Foreign Ministry outlining Libyan strategy for a campaign to move the OAU headquarters out of Addis Ababa, the capital of a feudal Empire that the new revolutionary leaders of Libya felt did not deserve the honor of becoming Africa's political capital. We had to alert our government and suggest ways of thwarting the Libyan design.

Historically, the two countries shared common centuries old culture and indeed the same form of Italian Fascist oppression. Both peoples had tested the wrath of Marshal Grazziani. While in Ethiopia Ras Abebe Aregay was waging stiff resistance against Italian occupation, the Libyans too had their great hero in the person of the legendary fighter, Omar Mukhtar.

The new Libyan revolutionary leaders, however, seemed obsessed with opposing any institution that enhanced the stature of the Imperial regime in Ethiopia. Egypt's revolution of 1952, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser that ousted King Faruq had already inspired many young revolutionaries in the Arab World. It was therefore not difficult to see why the young

Libyan revolutionaries targeted Imperial Ethiopia given the geopolitical game of the Arab World at the time.

Ambassador Assefa instructed me to translate into Amharic the document that related to Libyan strategy and carry it over to the Emperor and explain the details if need be. With the documents ready, I soon headed back to Addis aboard a German Luftwaffe (air force) plane that transported police technical assistance to Ethiopia on a regular basis.

On arrival, I was rushed to the Jubilee Palace in a police General's limousine and I had a one-on-one meeting with the Emperor. He had already taken his habitual afternoon nap and was alert when I was ushered into his office. Upon hearing the content of the report that I literally recited from memory, he said: "Leave them, they cannot exceed their limit". That was his way of telling us that he knew how to handle the situation. After briefing him on our work in Bonn, I bowed and left his office. Since I was due back the next day, I was told by the Aide-de-Camp to return to the palace the next morning and take leave of His Majesty.

The following day, at about mid-day, I was ushered this time into the Grand Palace Throne Room and met the Emperor, who was flanked by Prime Minister Aklilu Habte Wold and Ato Yilma Deressa, Minister for Finance. He said "INDIET SENEKETKH" (How are you?) He seemed to have forgotten that he had met me the previous day. He repeated the previous day's questions as to how Assefa was

doing and so on. He asked some questions unrelated to my mission, which I politely responded to.

The Emperor was visibly exhausted. He must have gone through a heavy schedule since the morning at the CHILOT, the imperial Supreme Court since he looked very tired. After all, he was eight-two years of age then. After the encounter, I bowed and left. Upon my return to Bonn, I related my observation regarding the Emperor's condition to the Ambassador. He was pensive for some time. "You know," he said, "His Majesty was always alert, he had the sharpest memory. If age is getting the better of him, I think it is the beginning of the end for the Imperial Order."

When the African summit started soon afterwards, the Emperor seemed to be back in good form. Under His Majesty's guidance, Prime Minister Aklilu, charismatic Foreign Minister Dr. Menassie Haile and the other seasoned diplomats of the Crown managed to avert an attempt by the Libyan delegation to relocate the OAU Headquarters.

A decade later, Libyan diplomats, led by Dr. Ali Triki, the Africa Expert in the Libyan government, tried their luck again at the nineteenth Summit of the OAU during President Mengistu's regime. That attempt too failed when Foreign Minister Goshu Wolde and his team of able diplomats provided the better argument and galvanized support for Addis Ababa.

At successive summits of the African Union, other attempts at re-locating the OAU/AU Head Quarters to Sirte in Libya always ended unsuccessfully, thanks largely to the solid argument provided by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin. Besides Libya, other countries such as Senegal, considered by many as Libyan surrogates who clearly envied the expanding potentials of conference tourism for the Ethiopian capital, continued unabated in their attempt to dilute Addis Ababa's importance. Neither Senegalese nor any other delegates could match the articulate reasoning of Prime Minister Meles in favour of retaining the seat of the Continental Organization in the Ethiopian capital.

The ongoing haggle over the seat of the African Union was paradoxical considering the historical closeness of Ethiopia and Libya that was particularly manifested during a great flood that hit Libya during the years after the latter's independence in 1951 during King Idris' reign when Ethiopia sent substantial assistance to Libya.

Two decades later after the fall of the Imperial regime in Ethiopia, The Guide, Leader of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Muamer Ghaddafi showed positive disposition towards Ethiopia and provided significant military and humanitarian assistance to Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime that was left cash-strapped in the wake of Ethiopia's break with the West.

At the height of the "Red Star" all-round economic reconstruction and military mopping up campaign conducted

in Eritrea by President Mengistu in collaboration with Soviet and East German assistance, Libyan logistics support towards the war efforts was evident. In 1982, a number of Libyan pilots and technical staff perished when their C-130 Hercules military transport plane crashed minutes after take-off from Addis Ababa. Libya also provided support through Ethiopia to John Garang's Southern Sudan rebel movement.

When Siad Barre switched his allegiance from Moscow to Washington, Libya was instrumental in the dismantling of the expansionist regime in Somalia through provision of tangible support to various armed groups based in Ethiopia, notable among which was the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) led by Abdulahi Yousuf, who in 2005 became President of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia that subsequently got wider recognition from the International Community.

My First encounter with the Libyan Leader was in Colombo in August 1976 at the summit of the non-aligned movement. Foreign Minister Kifle Wodajo had assigned me to follow up on Libyan politics and I took keen interest and had the chance to observe the actions of the Libyan leader at successive African summits he attended almost without fail.

Muammar Ghaddafi has been consistent in his desire to promote the cause of the "United States of Africa". He progressively displayed his turn-around from Arab nationalism of the Nasserite days to the fervent advocacy of Kwame Nkrumah's dream of Union Government for Africa.

However, the Libyan campaign to attain the goal of the United States of Africa, often promoted with Arabic / Islamic flavour did not attract many followers.

The Libyan Leader's frustration with the slow pace towards the attainment of this goal was clearly manifested when he was the notable absentee at the African Union Summit in Arusha in May 2008 that met to discuss precisely the issue of Union Government for Africa. Senegal was again among the minority that argued for fast tracking towards a union government while leaders like Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and South African President Thabo Mbeki chose a step- by-step approach.

In September 1969 when young army officers led by Colonel Ghaddafi took power in a bloodless coup, they were all revolutionaries who had in mind the regaining of control of the headquarters of the two US military bases that had been established in Libya during the Monarchy, the Wheeluss and Adams Air Bases. Wheeluss Air Base was subsequently re-named Mitiga Airbase after a little girl who was killed by US pilots that were on a target shooting practice near the base. Adams Airbase now bears the name of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghaddafi's role model who had shown the way with the nationalization of the Suez Canal in the early days of the Egyptian revolution.

The most significant milestones in Libya's history were the Islamization and the Arabization of the country that has been going on since the Middle Ages. Following



independence in 1951 and the subsequent discovery of large reserves of oil, the September 1969 Revolution ushered in a new era for the people of Libya. It was a country where regional divisions based on tribal lines were dominant.

The new revolutionary regime made the first real attempt to unify Libya's diverse peoples and create a distinct Libyan state and identity. It created new political structures and made a determined effort at accelerated economic development financed by oil revenues. Libyan leaders lead a relatively modest life and have avoided the opulence that is excessively apparent with other Middle Eastern leaders from oil rich sheikdoms. In fact, the Leader prefers his tent to a gilded presidential palace.

To the delight of Italian, German and South Korean contractors, Libya has invested heavily in the expansion of modern infrastructure, education and health facilities. However, managing the already completed structures remains a formidable challenge as Libya still lacks adequate numbers of skilled managers. The competition for Libyan contracts has always been fierce among western companies.

When it came to longevity in office, Muamer Ghaddafi's survival in power was possible largely due to his quick sense of adjusting politically and his flexibility to accommodate western interests that clearly understood were focusing on Libya's strategic vast oil reserves. He masterfully manipulated and responded to their ever-increasing appetite for oil on a mutually beneficial basis. Unlike in many other

African and Arab countries, though there were still some in the West that questioned Libyan human rights records, erstwhile members of the regime who had been dismissed from power were known to live and work in their own country as free citizens.

Externally, the support Libya provided to several African countries took the form among others of the largest mosque in Africa, The Ghaddafi Mosque in Kampala, Uganda. Libya also gave cash handouts to a number of African leaders who failed to meet their arrears of their assessed contributions to the continental Organization. In early seventies, Muamer Ghaddafi had provided millions of dollars to then Central African dictator Jean Bedel Bokassa when the latter declared he was converting to Islam under the name of Salehedin. After pocketing the money, Bokassa reverted to Christianity.

Hand in hand with its involvement in peace efforts in the Central African Republic, Congo, Comoros and Uganda, Libya was also a key player in the creation in the eighties of a short-lived strategic alliance, a tripartite pact with South Yemen and Ethiopia aimed at creating a united front of countries that the Socialist Camp considered at the time as truly progressive in the Middle East.

Muamer Ghaddafi always proclaimed he was not anti-Israeli. However his peers did not take seriously the bold suggestion in his “White Book” the creation of “ISRATIN” – an amalgamation of Israel and Palestine, which, he said,

would enhance harmonious existence between the Jews and Palestinians as one people.

Following the explosion of the PANAM 103 flight over the Scottish town of Lockerbie on December 21, 1988 that killed two hundred and seventy people, a Scottish court had established that Libyan agents were responsible for planting the explosive in the aircraft. The Reagan Administration bombed Ghaddafi's Tripoli residence in retaliation. The country's ostracism from the mainstream of world politics and the imposition of international sanctions soon followed.

During the Cold War era, Libya's support for rebels in any part of the world that called themselves "revolutionary forces" - including Eritrean separatist rebels and the Irish Republican Army - did not augur well for the country's relations with western governments. Successive British governments, from Margaret Thatcher's to Tony Blair's have been vocal in calling for and succeeded in mobilising the majority of the UN members to impose sanctions against the Libyan regime. However, a number of European countries overlooked the sanctions and remained major trading partners of Libya.

In the years that followed the invasion of Iraq by the "Coalition of the Willing" in 2003 and, in what was considered by observers as a lesson drawn from what happened to Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Libya's declared decision to abandon a budding its nuclear power development and its offer to compensate the families of victims of the

Lockerbie PANAM 103 air disaster were deemed as steps in the right direction.

Following Libya's progressively positive approach in its relations with former adversaries, international sanctions that had crippled its trade and diplomatic relations for a long time were lifted in the new millennium and normal relations resumed. The United States removed Libya from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Tripoli's seemingly cosy relations with states that are not so favoured by the West have posed challenges for diplomats engaged in the normalization and intensification of better relations with Libya. Non-the less, under Muamer Gaddafi's leadership, Libya has definitely stamped its mark on world politics.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Diplomacy at the Service of Humanitarianism*

Ethiopia has had an unfortunate history of cyclical drought that every time it occurred affected a significant numbers of people, rendering them food insecure. Agricultural production traditionally depended overwhelmingly on rainfall. In addition, the population has been growing at a faster rate than that of food production. Although the immediate cause is weather, there have been persistent problems related to factors like governance and land ownership systems.

Thus, in early 1973, when severe drought hit the north central provinces of Ethiopia, Wello in particular, news of the plight of the people began to filter through to the outside world. The exodus into Addis Ababa of drought victims was increasing every day. Concerned university staff and students went to the province and upon their return began reporting on the catastrophic situation that was unfolding in that part of Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, the Viceroy of Wello, Crown Prince Asfa Wossen had suffered a stroke and was taken to London for treatment. The ENDERASIE - Special Representative of the Emperor, Dejazmatch Solomon Abraha, who is an uncle to Isaias Afeworqi, could not manage the situation without massive national and international assistance.

The news of the calamity in the province began to spread in the University, colleges, high schools and military barracks. The Emperor had visited the area that same year, but as a cover up His Majesty was shown only well-fed children and had not been made aware of the severity of the situation by officials who habitually brought only good tidings to his royal ears.

Nonetheless, the Minister for Agriculture, the former President of the Haile Selassie University, Kassa Wolde Mariam who later became my prison mate at the Grand Palace cellars, was in constant touch with Ambassador Assefa Lemma to mobilise as much German assistance as possible. We did not comprehend the gravity of the drought until we saw a BBC documentary film prepared by the famous journalist cum writer Jonathan Dimbelby.

I later learnt that student leaders Abdul Mejid Husain and Berhane Mesqel Redda and university academic staff including Dr. Eshetu Chole as well as other progressive and compassionate technocrats had facilitated Dimbelby's filming in Wello without the knowledge of the higher authorities in Addis Ababa and Dessie, the provincial capital. The message reached the world loud and clear.

Ambassador Assefa, Girma Alemu and the rest of us in the Embassy could not control our emotions at seeing the heart-wrenching pictures on German TV. The Ambassador had already approached Interior Minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, Foreign Minister Walter Scheel, and former

German Ambassador to Ethiopia Dr. Kurt Muller then serving as Senior Advisor in the Foreign Ministry, to help in our frantic efforts to save lives in Wello.

Soon the Germans dispatched regularly a Trans-All military aircraft packed with food and other assistance to Ethiopia. Ambassador Assefa spent quite some time in Addis to help coordinate the German humanitarian effort. The British, the Americans and the Scandinavians also provided humanitarian relief.

Following Dimbelby's BBC documentary, Henry Nannen, Publisher of the German Magazine, Stern, started a wider campaign that reinforced and accelerated drought relief assistance mobilization in Europe and America.

Despite the efforts made on all fronts, the initial response was not enough to avert the worsening situation. Blame was expectedly ascribed to the Imperial regime for delayed response in the face of such massive starvation. Churches, humanitarian agencies and individuals of goodwill the world over, including King Faisal of Saudi Arabia donated substantial amount of money.

The outpouring of international assistance needed an efficient coordination mechanism and Ato Shimelis Adugna was named relief and rehabilitation Commissioner to take charge of the drive to mobilize further assistance and ensure that such assistance was utilized properly where it was most needed.

Besides Ambassador Assefa and his staff in Bonn, other Ethiopian diplomats in Washington, New York, Stockholm, Paris, Rome and London were actively involved in this effort. General Eyassu, the Ambassador to the Court of St. James and his staff were also active in sensitizing British public opinion. They succeed in whipping significant humanitarian assistance from the British government and public.

For us in Bonn and other Ethiopian missions, the priority was to get as much aid as possible and help save lives. We could not defend an Imperial regime we knew was getting weaker by the day and was already starting to crack under increasing pressure from students and disgruntled soldiers.

After the overthrow of the Emperor in 1974 Ambassador Assefa stayed in Bonn as a political exile. He longed to go back to his native land but died of cancer of the liver one year before the fall of the Derg.

Ambassador Assefa Lemma's death was a big blow to his wife Woizero Senedu and members of the family and indeed all those who knew him as a kind friend and dedicated servant of his country. The family did all they could to prolong his life before he succumbed to the inevitable.

Back in December 1973, Dr. Menassie, who had moved from Information to the Foreign Ministry assigned me to Khartoum where I took over as Charge d' Affairs.



Ambassador Dawit Abdou, a witty elderly technocrat was preparing to go into retirement.

Ambassador Dawit and his wife, Woizero Tsehay, received me in Khartoum and provided generous hospitality. The Ambassador had in-depth knowledge of Sudanese history and culture and was a well-connected man. He was on his second tour of duty to the Sudanese capital.

As a career diplomat, Ato Dawit Abdou kept himself educated and other than his native Amharic and Oromiffa spoke classical and modern Arabic, Russian and French. He was on the best of terms with most Sudanese officials to the extent that they considered him as one of their own.

Before Ambassador Dawit left Khartoum, he opened many doors that helped me in dealing with the Jafar Nimeiry's regime. We forged closer contacts and excellent working relationship with Dr. Mansour Khalid the Foreign Minister, his successors, Jamal Mohamed Ahmed and Mohammed Mirghani.

Ethiopia's interests in the Sudan remained vital regardless of the regime in Addis or Khartoum. The close relationships between the two peoples had evolved over several years and were reinforced by the Great Mahdi, his son Prime Minister Sadiq El Mahdi, Presidents Abdalla Khallil, General Ibrahim Aboud, and Emperor Haile Selassie had to be maintained. It was a welcome challenge.



## CHAPTER TEN

### *Assignment in Khartoum, Onset of Revolution*

To Ethiopian diplomats, save for the desert climate, there is no better place in the world to serve than in Khartoum. The city is like home away from home. The Sudanese are among the most generous people I have ever known. They have always been welcoming towards Ethiopians. Their facial features, music and culture are very similar to ours and despite the Arabic language that separated the two sister countries; the Sudanese remain attached to Ethiopia and Ethiopians.

I arrived in Khartoum in the early morning of December, 31, 1973 to be greeted by a temperature of above forty degrees centigrade; a stark contrast with the freezing cold climate I left behind in Germany. My family joined me later after I had settled.

I was met at the airport by Girma Mengistu, a former navigation officer with the Imperial Ethiopian Air Force, who after re-training joined Ethiopian Airlines and was working in Khartoum as station manager. Our chemistry blended and since then, Girma has remained a very good family friend. After a brief interlude at Poona University in India where he studied air transport management, Girma returned as senior staff of the airline and we spent the next six years that followed together in Ethiopia and Europe. He and his wife

Yodit now run a successful cargo transportation business in Dubai.

At the Embassy in Khartoum which is located not far from former President Ibrahim Aboud's home in the New Extension area, Ambassador Dawit Abdou warmly welcomed me and we went into the business of briefing and debriefing each other. He left Khartoum after a few weeks.

Back home, as the situation in Wello continued to deteriorate, a fundamental change in the relatively tranquil life of all Ethiopians was only two months away. Revolution was in the air.

On the sunny day of February 21, 1974, following a petrol price hike, taxi drivers in Addis Ababa began a strike. Army units in the capital and in the provinces, particularly in the southern garrison town of Negelli had already begun to put forward demands for salary increases. Soon, strikes were spreading like bushfire in all areas of public life. The Imperial regime, unable to handle the Wello situation and control its soldiers was facing mounting anarchy.

Despite efforts at a peaceful dialogue by Prime Minister Aklilu Habte Wold, university students were emboldened to continue with their almost daily protests with increasing demands for radical land tenure reform. Under mounting pressure, Prime Minister Aklilu Habte Wold tendered his resignation to the Emperor and Lij Endalkachew Mekonnen

was appointed to form a new cabinet. This was unprecedented the history of the country.

As the new cabinet, composed of mostly members of the entrenched ruling class and senior army generals took office, those who missed out and had served in the last cabinet spent most of their time at the Imperial Palace. The new Cabinet included members of the former regime, notably, former Air Force Commander Gen. Assefa Ayene as Aviation Minister and President of the Senate and Gen. Abiy Abebe as Defence Minister.

This did not dampen the restlessness of the lower ranks of the armed forces and when the Ground Forces Commander Gen. Dresse Dubale was sent to negotiate with dissident officers in Negelli, he was detained and held captive. The public and members of the Armed Forces in particular, now understood the regime was not as invincible as they had previously perceived it to be.

The peoples' anger grew by the day when they saw it was the same ruling class that continued to serve as the pillar for prolonging the life of the feudal regime. Endalkachew, who came from the ruling class and had good intentions, was unable to use the historic opportunity to radically change the system of government.

The rebellion spread to every barrack and unit of the armed forces and police. Strikes were rampant and Endalkachew, who was trying to take full control by

immobilizing what he thought was a parallel cabinet still nestling in the Palace, could not handle the situation. Armed Forces committees mushroomed everywhere and senior officers were being detained every day. Radio Ethiopia and all other government media also felt liberated and reported the events as they unfolded.

In early March, my father-in-law who was already a Senator was returning to Addis after tending his farm in Shashemane when he was stopped on the way by rebel Air Force non-commissioned officers in Debrezeit and interrogated for a whole night after mistaking him for the other General Kebede, the former Defence Minister.

As Senator Kebede Wagaye was leaving their compound following the interrogation, the guard at the gate who obviously did not get the order in good time to let the Senator out, simply showered his car with bullets. Luckily, Senator Kebede only sustained slight injuries and drove straight to the Body Guard hospital in Addis to have his wounds dressed. When he informed me of this incident, we both concluded that anarchy had taken over in the Army and the days of the Imperial order were numbered.

Meanwhile, the challenges that confronted Lij Endalkachew were becoming enormous. University students and intellectuals who included my friend Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot continued to press for radical land tenure reform if Ethiopia was to be self-sufficient in food production. They argued that a change of cabinet in itself

would not solve the age-old problem of land reforms they had for years been advocating. Instead they advocated for a new order that would usher in Socialism. They did not foresee that the “Socialist” regime that imposed itself on the country after Endalkachew would be one they had not really bargained for.

Later in mid-June, Major Atnafu Abate, a graduate of Haile Selassie University was serving in the Fourth Army Division when he set up an Armed Forces Coordinating Committee. This Committee came after an earlier one formed by Col. Alem Zewd of the Paratroops Regiment who was thought to be too close to Endalkachew.

The new committee, initially headed by Maj. Atnafu, Abate reconstituted itself and chose as its new Chairman Maj. Mengistu Haile Mariam, an articulate US-trained logistics officer who was delegated by the Harar-based Third Army Division. Maj. Mengistu travelled hastily from Harar to join the committee. In Harar, he was already leading dissident soldiers and had detained his senior commanders who included a well-known strategist, Gen. Haile Baikedagn. The Coordinating Committee immediately assumed the infamous name, DERG. From the start, the signs were obvious to anyone who bothered to see that Major Mengistu called the shots. According to him, his own interests were Ethiopia's and in the course of the revolution, his colleagues who refused to regard him in this light paid a heavy price.

Representatives from various armed forces divisions - about one hundred and twenty Derg members - at first

tactfully declared their loyalty to the Imperial Crown. In the meantime, the Commission of Inquiry set up by Prime Minister Endalkachew to look into abuses by past officials was in full swing.

For the first time in the country's history, powerful personalities had to answer publicly before a commission on alleged abuses and their past activities as officials. Some of the questions posed by certain members of the commission like former Attorney General and Ethiopia's representative to the World Bank, Dr. Bereket-Ab Habte Selassie, were thought by many to be vindictive and clearly designed to incite ferocious public anger against former officials. Nevertheless, most hoped and expected that after the rigorous enquiries, the law would take its own course.

Meanwhile, the Derg continued with the arrests and detentions at the Fourth Army Division Headquarters of past officials, starting with Lij Endalkachew himself. Ras Mesfin Sileshi, a famous patriot and confidant of the Emperor as well as other notable absentees were asked to give themselves in at the command headquarters in good time or have their vast properties expropriated. All of them with the exception of Dejazmatch Tshayu Enquo Selassie complied. The latter died in a shoot out with agents of the Derg.

The Derg it was claimed carried out all this with the consent of the aging and helpless Emperor who hoped to prolong his hold on the throne with a new set of younger and more powerful aides. He also agreed to the Derg's proposal to



name Lij Michael Emru, son of the famous Ras Emru, as the new Prime Minister with the charismatic Gen. Aman Michael Andom as Chief of Staff and Defence Minister.

Maj. Gen. Aman, a senior officer of Eritrean origin who was trained by the British while in exile in the Sudan during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, was serving as Senator when the Derg called him back to lead the Armed Forces. He was chosen for the task purely on the strength of his past record as exemplary commander during the Korean War in 1950s and the 1956 war with Somalia.

Gen. Aman soon became a star and the front person of the Derg and toured government offices and army barracks to explain the purpose behind the Derg's Motto of "*Ethiopia Tiqdem*" (Putting Ethiopia First). The rest of the Derg's membership remained nameless and faceless for a long time - unknown to a large segment of the public.

As the number of former officials still at large dwindled from day to day, various institutions that sustained the regime like the Crown Council and the Imperial Ministry of Pen were closed one by one. The Derg flexed its new muscle more and more. The creeping coup was approaching its climax.

On the eve of the Ethiopian New Year, the eleventh day of September, the Derg effectively used the media to broadcast films and a long program narrating the horrors inflicted on the people of Ethiopia by cyclical drought and the regime's

callous neglect as demonstrated by the behaviour of what were labelled as self-serving officials of the Imperial government. The stage was set to dethrone the Emperor. Dimbelby's documentary film came in handy for the purpose.

On September 12, 1974, I woke up from my bed in Khartoum when my wife tuned in to Radio Ethiopia that was broadcasting martial music and a special announcement: "Emperor Haile Selassie the First has been deposed!" This was followed by a series of announcements regarding the policy of the new Provisional Military Administrative Council headed by the Derg as a collegiate Head of State. Gen. Aman, besides his current portfolio was declared Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council.

The new cabinet under Gen. Aman included Lij Michael Emru, the outgoing Prime Minister as Information Minister. Dejazmatch Zewde Gebre Selassie, an Oxford-trained intellectual and relative of the Emperor was named Foreign Minister. The rest of the cabinet was more or less civilian. The Derg had decided to use professional technocrats for the day-to-day running of the State's affairs.

The United States, Britain and other major governments were quick to accord recognition to the new Ethiopian regime. The Sudanese were particularly pleased as General Aman grew up and lived in Khartoum when Ethiopia was under Italian occupation. He spoke Arabic like the Sudanese and they believed this would ease interaction with the new regime. But history was to take a different course.

Gen. Aman wanted to visit Sudan immediately after his propulsion to the helm of State but the internal problems within the Derg and a multitude of other tasks prevented him from doing so. Instead, in mid October 1974, one month after the Derg assumed power, a delegation headed by Maj. Atnafu Abate visited the Sudan.

From my sources in Addis Ababa, I had been informed that Maj. Atnafu was in fact Number Two in the Derg hierarchy after Maj. Mengistu. I ensured he was received at the airport by no lesser personality than Maj. Abulqassim, Gen. Nimiery's deputy. There was a large turn out of Sudanese officials at the airport to meet a leading member of the Derg, hitherto a faceless entity.

As Maj. Atnafu and I were driving together in the official Embassy limousine complete with the pennant and motor escort, young school children on mid-day break greeted us in large numbers from the roadside with the waving of their hands. This gave Atnafu a fix. He waved back enthusiastically, turned to me and said: "I did not know it was so simple." I asked, "What?"

He responded by telling me that he always tuned into the radio every time the Emperor was on a visit abroad and heard about the warm reception he received from the people on the streets. "It was so simple!" These words sent a cold chill down my spine since I began to suspect that the military, having tasted power, protocol and glory, might never go back

to the barracks as they had promised in their “*Ethiopia Tiqdem*” motto.

Maj. Atnafu’s delegation consisted of two other Derg members, Major Negash, Lieutenant Alemayehu as well the designated adviser from the Foreign Ministry, my friend Dr. Fitigu. Fitigu and I were intrigued to know of the inner workings, structure and personalities in the Derg and posed questions to the Derg members whenever we had the opportunity in between schedules.

Maj. Atnafu was ready to volunteer information but the young police lieutenant, Alemayehu Haile, cut him short most of the time with the warning that this was not the ideal place for such discussions. We sensed that Major Mengistu in the course of consolidating his powers had already put in place a system of checks and control within the Derg. It was also apparent that Atnafu was not really powerful. Maj. Negash, who later on defected to the Eritrean Peoples’ Liberation Front, was noticeably quiet.

During Maj. Atnafu’s lengthy meeting with Gen. Nimeiry at the Republican Palace, the Sudanese leader commended the Derg on a job well done. He went on to praise them for their systematic dismantling of an archaic and feudal monarchy an act that he said constituted a new chapter in military history. He offered to cooperate with the leaders of the new military government. Maj. Atnafu and his colleagues were elated.

After the meeting, we were all driven to Wad Medani, an agricultural centre south of Khartoum and to other development sites, with Major Abulqassim as our tour guide. The delegation's three-day visit was a success and I was happy to see their plane take off.

No sooner had Maj. Atnafu returned to Addis Ababa than tension began to rise within the Derg. The junior non-commissioned officers were constantly challenging General Aman's authority as a senior officer and leader. There was disagreement on the very structure of the Derg.

Some of the young officers within the Derg, who considered Mao Tse Tung, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as their role models believed that power literally came through the barrel of a gun. The Eritrean question, the lengthy process of the Commission of Inquiry and other issues began to exhaust their patience. A number of them were bent on resolving all differences with a shootout. Gen. Aman began boycotting Derg meetings and remained at his home near the old airport. He had made it clear to them that he did not want to be considered a puppet, as were Gen. Naguib of Nasser's Egypt and Spínola of post-Salazar Portugal.

Major Mengistu and his colleagues had reportedly tried, in vain, to convince Gen. Aman to rejoin them. But the General thought that he was being used and as a career military man and as a believer in the sanctity of the chain of command, he could not take orders from non-commissioned officers nor

see eye to eye with the rest of the pack on major issue of fundamental change in Ethiopia.

There were also those who accused Gen. Aman of advancing the agenda of Eritrean secession. The General's differences with the junior officers turned violent when a young Major, Daniel Asfaw, upon receiving orders from the core leadership of the Derg, led a tank assault on the home of the General. Though he knew he was outgunned, Gen. Aman vowed not to go down without a fight and put up a spirited fight. The General died when Maj. Daniel's tanks finally smashed through his villa.

While the skirmishes were taking place at the old airport area, the Derg was meeting at the Grand Palace under the chairmanship of Maj. Mengistu who was being updated with a blow-by-blow account of the incident. Sadly, the attack on the General was in clear violation of the Derg's avowed motto: *Ethiopia Tiqdem Yale Minim Dem*, (May Ethiopia Advance without Any Bloodshed). This incident would only be just a tip of the iceberg.

That evening, while listening to Radio Ethiopia in my house in Khartoum, there were reports of smoke and gunfire at the old airport area in Addis. The extent of the brutality that took place was not revealed until the next morning when the Derg announced over the national radio that it had made a "political decision" and eliminated sixty former officials. That was a political mass murder in a scale unprecedented in the history of Ethiopia.

The Derg meeting at the Grand Palace on the previous day had literally been turned into a Kangaroo court with radicals arguing that there was no time for legal procedures to bring the former officials to justice. The level-headed members were clearly out-numbered. That, many believe, was the first big mistake committed by the Derg, which until then moved cautiously in its deliberations.

Derg members were fully aware of the consequences of eliminating a General so popular in the army. Thus, in a move believed to justify the killing of Gen. Aman, Maj. Mengistu had the names of former notables read out one by one and asked his colleagues to vote on the fate of the detained former officials.

They passed death verdicts on Prime Minister Aklilu and Gen. Aman. Maj. Mengistu was already aware of Gen. Aman's killing even before the votes were taken. Archival materials that were recovered after EPRDF took power showed that Maj. Mengistu himself signed the execution order of the sixty officials.

That same evening they called out the condemned political prisoners from the Grand Palace cellars and the Fourth Army Division compound handcuffed and drove them to the Central Prison adjacent to the head quarters of the Organization of African Unity. There, under the supervision of the Derg leadership, a firing squad finished the job. The bodies were

buried in unmarked mass graves within the premises of the Addis Ababa prison.

In the wake of the demise of the Derg in 1990, the remains of the slain officials were dug out and re-buried with honour at the Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa. That prison site was eventually donated to the African Union to serve as an extended compound for the continental Headquarters.

The December 1974 incident shocked the whole world and Ethiopians were helplessly subdued as radicals in the Derg fully asserted their authority through the barrel of the gun. In the solitude of our Khartoum apartment, my wife and I mourned the death of our senior compatriots. Personally, I could not handle the death of so many personalities I had come to know closely, especially that of my very close friend Gen. Kebede Gebre.

General Kebede Gebre and I had developed warm friendship since the early seventies during his frequent visits to Bonn. He was appointed to head the defence ministry after his successful tenure in the Congo as UN Forces Commander in the early sixties and later on as Governor of Harar. Although I was only giving him professional support, he was always extremely grateful. He was noble and despite his high office, he was a simple man. Whenever I was in Addis, the General would personally pick me up from my hotel and take me to his home where his gracious wife Woizero Desta Gebru, Woizero Senedou's younger sister, would extend warm hospitality.



During the Korean war of the fifties, Gen. Kebede Gebre was in command of the Ethiopian contingent of UN forces and a young and flamboyant officer; Lt. Col. Aman was his Deputy. According to a hand-written diary shown to me by his son Tamrat, General, then Colonel Kebede Gebre, prophetically predicted that “Lt. Col. Aman, a charismatic leader and popular officer, would one day rise to greater heights, but, his unpredictable temperament would take him down.” As it were, fate took both of them down on the same day.

After the mass execution on that December night in 1974, the then Foreign Minister Dr. Dejazmatch Zewde Gebre Selassie who was attending the UN General Assembly in New York expressed his shock and condemnation of the killings in Addis and resigned immediately preferring to stay in exile in the US. Those events in Addis clearly sparked the beginning of the great Ethiopian Diaspora.

An exodus of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians followed. These included Dejazmatch Zewde’s successor, Ato Kifle Wodajo, who was serving in Washington at the time. Several other diplomats and seasoned technocrats also chose exile. These included Ambassador Assefa Lemma, Gen. Eyassu Mengesha, ambassador to the Court of St. James’ and Ambassador Zewde Retta who was serving in Italy. Economists including Bulcha Demeqssa who served as Endalkachew’s Finance Minister for a brief period and Bekele Endeshaw who succeeded Assefa Lemma as

Ambassador in Bonn and many others later on joined the ranks of hundreds of international civil servants who were to return to their country only after the demise of the Derg seventeen years later.

Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, the Derg elected another front man as Chairman of the Provisional Administrative Council in the person of General Teferi Bante. I knew Gen. Teferi when he was still an army major and instructor at the Military School in Holetta. At that time, his son, Ayneshet, was my schoolmate. Ayneshet and I were to meet later under very sad circumstances.

After the execution of the former officials in 1974, Drs. Haile Fida, Negede Gobeze and other Marxist intellectuals who had returned from their studies in Europe, began to identify key players within the Derg and started to quietly imbue them with Marxist thoughts. EPRP adherents too had their constituents inside the Derg.

The power struggle that had been simmering within the Derg thus began to assume an ideological veneer. First, it was 'Ethiopian Socialism'; a mixture of state controlled and private economy in a centralised political structure. Then the doctrinaire ideology of scientific socialism dominated political life in Ethiopia.

Soviet communists saw an opportunity in this and offered to train, at their political institutes in Russia, members of the Derg and other young revolutionaries in scientific socialism.

Several other socialist countries, proxies of the Soviet Union, and China offered the same help and the Derg grabbed every opportunity.

On one first such exercise, while I was in the Sudan, a group of trainees consisting of Derg members and other revolutionaries came through Khartoum on their way to Moscow. There was no direct flight and they had to spend a night on transit. I had to facilitate their onward journey. As we drove with our guests from the airport to the Grand Hotel on the banks of the Nile, my Embassy colleagues and I could sense immediately that they were a divided group.

A young US-trained Air Force lieutenant, later Captain, Fiqre Selassie Wogderess, seemed to be in charge of the group and he immediately jumped into the ambassadorial limousine. Another officer, Maj. Yemane, approached me and quietly told me that he, and not Fiqre Selassie, was the leader. Wishing not to interfere in what I thought was their internal problem, I told Maj. Yemane not to worry as this was only a transit stop-over and not an official visit to the Sudan.

The group left the next day and as it transpired later, while in Moscow, they were split between EPRP sympathizers led by Police Lieutenant Tamrat and Capt. Amaha on one side, and anti-EPRP Derg members led by Capt. Fiqre Selassie on the other. Maj. Yemane did not return to Addis after completing the training in Moscow. That division was soon to manifest itself in bloody confrontations at home. Fiqre

Selassie was to play a major role through out the Derg's rule in the years that followed.

In the first years of the revolution, Khartoum became a busy transit point for the Derg's diplomatic missions to Eastern Europe, West Africa and the Middle East. The sensitization campaign about the declared new policy of peace and cooperation was also coordinated in Khartoum.

During stopovers of high-level delegations, President Nimeiry was always ready to offer his good advice to the delegations that included Lij Michael Emru, Maj. Berhanu Bayih, a prominent member of the Derg, Justice Minister Amanuel Amde Michael, Trade Minister, Mohammed Abdurrahman; Ambassador Mengisteh Desta and Dr. Fitigu Tadesse.

The Embassy was always kept busy. We all knew that, notwithstanding his professed friendship with the new Government in Addis Ababa, President Nimeiry, a cunning political player, was also in good terms with Eritrean secessionist leaders Osman Saleh Sabbe and Isaias Afeworqi to whom he had provided unlimited Sudanese diplomatic support. Sometimes he would receive the rebel leaders in his office on the heels of Ethiopian delegations.

In the midst of these activities, there were also secret missions by Derg agents. On one such occasion just before the December massacre of the sixty officials, Ras Mengesha Seyoum, then Governor of Tigray and his younger son,

Seyoum Mengesha had voted with their feet and reached the safety of Khartoum as Derg commandos were hunting them. Ras Mengesha had a great reputation as a reformer during his various government assignments.

With my Embassy colleagues Ismael Hassan and Col. Meshesha Wolde Tsadiq, we felt morally obliged to protect Ras Mengesha and when Majors Daniel and Getachew Shibeshi, both reputed ruthless killers, came to Khartoum to seek him out, we chose to disabuse them of such a callous attempt since clearly their intention was against any international norm - posing an infringement on Sudanese sovereignty. In any case, I told them, the Embassy had no information on the whereabouts of Ras Mengesha and his son.

Meanwhile, I was informed that Sudanese Chief of Security, Col. Khalifa had taken steps to re-locate Ras Mengesha and his son and to facilitate their onward journey to another country. Majors Daniel and Getachew Shibeshi thus left Khartoum without having accomplished their mission. We heaved a sigh of relief. Years later, I was privileged to have as my colleague in the UN in New York Ras Mengesha's other son Yohannes Mengesha. Ras Mengesha now commutes between Addis Ababa and Washington.

While on one of their missions to the Middle East, Lij Michael Emru and his team had met in Beirut one former Ethiopian student, Tesfaye Tadesse Wolde Medhin. What

they did not know at the time was that the individual had together with his colleagues hijacked a small aircraft to Khartoum a few years earlier and absconded with money stolen from his own comrades. Tesfaye had subsequently settled in Beirut, posing as a revolutionary in exile. The team had long discussions with him and persuaded him to return home.

As Tesfaye Tadesse Wolde-Medhin transited via Khartoum, Col. Khalifa's men who already had a dossier on him arrested him on the pretext of finding in his suitcase communist propaganda and related literature. Khalifa asked me what to do with the man and I advised him to confiscate the unwanted material, if he wished, and let him go rather wait for a diplomatic incident to happen.

Upon arrival in Ethiopia Tesfaye Tadesse Wolde Medhin soon managed to infiltrate the highest echelons of the Derg and declare himself the only genuine communist next to Maj. Mengistu. We were told later that he perished in late 1978 in the power struggle that ensued between the different so-called Marxist-Leninist groups.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *The Revolutionary Saga*

In May 1975, as the war in northern Ethiopia intensified, Gen. Teferi Bante, the new Chairman of the Derg was advised to form a special technical advisory group in his office to deal with the Eritrean question. I was thus called to join the new team headed by Ato Taye Retta, a highly respected cartographer and Director of the Borders Administration in the Ministry of the Interior.

Woineshet was six months pregnant with our second son Henok and the timing was just good enough for air travel back to Ethiopia. I gladly obliged and soon after our arrival in Addis, Capt. Getachew put us up in his house until we found some adequate quarters.

At that time, most of the young intellectuals who heeded the call to return home from their highly paying jobs abroad, including Berhane Deressa, Berhanu Dinka and others, did so because like the young soldiers who overthrew the monarchy, they sincerely believed that they could help modernize Ethiopia.

During the change of government, every one of us believed we could exert a moderating influence on a largely unprepared regime that had imposed itself on the country. It was sort of an individual and collective attempt at damage control.

When I returned to Addis Ababa, in June 1975, my friend Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot was married only a year earlier to his pretty fiancée, Zewditu Tesfaye, and like me, he was also looking for a good apartment for his soon-to-be enlarged family. He found two in Piazza, next to Mosvold Store and encouraged me to take the adjacent one so that we can live close to each other. It was a happy combination of two families into one small closely-knit community because Woineshet and Zewditu also struck a lasting friendship proving providing to us throughout the years their sincere dedicated and steadfast support.

By this time my friend Tesfaye, had been assigned to run Radio Ethiopia, first as Department Head then as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information. I was happy to be closely cooperating with him in my new function that largely entailed public relations and communication.

At the Chairman's office, where I was initially posted upon my return from Khartoum, every senior Derg member who visited our office felt they should interfere in our daily work to the point of micro-managing us in areas they were not really qualified. I was not so happy with the atmosphere under which I was working.

Subsequently, with Foreign Minister Kifle Wodajo's concurrence, I asked to be allowed to remain a member of the Foreign Ministry Staff and Gen. Teferi, who was himself a victim of unwarranted daily intrusions, agreed. Soon, I was



appointed to head the Press and Information Division in the Foreign Ministry and I felt more comfortable until the Beirut-based Tesfaye was appointed by Major Mengistu himself to head the Asia Department.

During the month of March 1976 as Ato Kifle and his Deputy, Permanent Secretary Getachew Kibret were coordinating the preparation of important documents prior to Maj. Mengistu's secret visit to China, Tesfaye Tadesse, who should have taken the lead was unavailable. Thus, Berhanu Dinka, who was heading the Africa Department; our Senior Adviser, Tesfaye Mekasha; Berhane Deressa, Head of the International Department and I were tasked to write the briefing notes. At Ato Kifle's insistence, Maj. Mengistu chose Berhanu Dinka, to accompany him to Beijing.

In the meantime, in the neighbouring French colony of Djibouti, warring factions of Afars led by former titular Prime Minister Ali Aref, and Issas led by the venerable Hassan Gouled Aptidon were fighting for leadership. While the political wrangling was going on among politicians in the tiny Red Sea territory, Ato Kifle felt that Ethiopia's vital interests in Djibouti were at stake and decided to dispatch to the port city a senior diplomat to represent Ethiopia. Dr. Fitigu, who was handling the Djibouti dossier in the Ministry, was eminently qualified to carry out the assignment.

At home, the Derg too was also locked in a big power struggle. The first violent wave of purges six months earlier had already claimed the lives of the sharp Chief of Political

Affairs, Air Force Maj. Sissay Habteh and the Head of Literacy and Development Campaign, Col. Kiros Alemayehu.

Maj. Sissay's arrest and execution came suddenly upon our return from Mauritius after attending the OAU Summit in July 1976 in a delegation led by Gen. Teferi. Sissay's crime was read over the radio as having "attempted to turn Ethiopia into another Chile", in other words, of trying to reverse the socialist course of the Revolution. Apparently his growing popularity and the consequences that it might entail for Maj. Mengistu were not lost on Sissay's intellectually challenged adversaries within the military leadership.

While in Mauritius, from the way he spoke of the Derg, we all felt that Maj. Sissay was disaffected and clearly predicted his own fate. Nonetheless, he returned to the lion's den hoping perhaps he would survive. Sadly, our worst fears came true. His arrest and subsequent execution were swift and shocking.

During informal discussions in Port Louise at a gathering where Berhanu Dinka, Wossen Beshah and other members of the delegation were present, Major Sissay could not hide his disgust at the way the Derg was conducting itself.

One morning, in between meetings of the Summit, he called and asked me whether I would be willing to accompany him to the city centre, since he wanted to buy a Singer sewing machine for his wife. He also told me that should any thing happen to him, the only gift he would leave

behind to help sustain her livelihood and that of their small children would most likely be if she started to do some tailoring of ladies dresses. Tailoring was the only skill his wife had learnt.

Following Sissay's execution, endless meetings were held at the Grand Palace on the reorganisation of the Derg. A new structure for a reorganized leadership was drafted by the allegedly EPRP sympathizer Capt. Alemayehu Haile. Capt. Moges was given the political portfolio that was left vacant when Major Sissay was executed. Many saw this move as posing a serious threat to Lt. Col. Mengistu's power.

By now almost all Derg members had moved one rank higher in line with timely mobility procedures within the armed forces. Finally Lt. Col. Mengistu tactfully accepted the reorganization plan that had clipped his wings. Observers were agreed that he was waiting for his time.

At that time of the intense power struggle within the Derg, Ato Kifle Wodajo and his team in the Foreign Ministry were preparing a policy paper for a peaceful resolution to the Eritrean question. That paper, "Eritrea, Then and Now" was billed by many as well done, grounded on historical processes that led to the unity of the two parts of the ancient Ethiopian empire.

We were told later that Dr. Haile Fida and his group then dominating Lt Col. Mengistu's camp roundly rejected Ato Kifle's paper. That paper had called for an all-inclusive

solution to the problem. Instead, they came up with their own Stalinist thesis. They had also rejected, in a similar manner another policy paper on Somalia prepared earlier: “War Clouds over the Horn of Africa”.

Incidentally, this phrase taken from Ato Kifle’s paper, appeared later on as title of a book written by a Cuban author who many thought must have had a glimpse of the report, given Cuba’s close association with radicals in the Derg.

During the sixties, Gen. Teferi served as Military Attaché in Washington for the Imperial government and worked closely with Ato Kifle who was then Ambassador. Knowing Ato Kifle’s skills as a solid intellectual and diplomat, he could appreciate the work done in the Foreign Ministry. The majority in the Derg also welcomed Ato Kifle’s papers but could not assert themselves. There were differences of approach on many other issues as well. National reconciliation, namely rapprochement with EPRP, was a thorny issue as both camps were already waging intensified armed struggle.

On several issues of foreign policy, radicals around the Derg sought to take Ethiopia totally into the Soviet sphere. Bulgarian communists of those days could not have done better in terms of selling out fully to Soviet domination. In the Foreign Ministry the professionals, guided by Ato Kifle Wodajo, sought to keep national interests above all else and consistently tried to disabuse the Derg of the plunge into Soviet fiefdom. Gen. Teferi and Ato Kifle were clear about

their vision for Ethiopia's future, which was strict adherence to non-alignment. That stand was clearly articulated by Gen. Teferi in Colombo during his encounter with Indian Prime Minister Indira Ghandi at the Non-Aligned Summit in the summer of the same year. I was his interpreter. This moderate approach by a segment of the Derg membership of course brought out the wrath of the resident Soviet agents upon all professionals in the Foreign Ministry. Radicals in the Derg, wishing to please their Soviet backers, got rid of many able Ethiopians whose only wish was to serve their country in the best way they could.

In January 1977, in the wake of the death of Chinese Premier, Chou En Lai, the Hua Kwo Fung Administration invited an Ethiopian media delegation to Beijing. My Friend Col. Asrat who was confirmed in his post as Head of the Derg's Information Department during the reorganisation process was asked to lead the delegation.

Several Media professionals who included senior journalists Mairegu Bezabeh, Haile Mariam Goshu, Lt. Tibebu Shifferaw and I were instructed to be part of the delegation. Major Girma Neway, later on created Commandant of the National Police Force with the rank of Maj. Gen. was the only other person from the Derg office.

Our visit went on very well and we saw much of China during our three weeks there. We visited communes, factories, schools, historical sites that included Chairman Mao's birth place, Dr. Sun Yat Sen's Mausoleum and, of

course, the Great Wall. Wherever we went, our hosts quoted Chairman Mao all the time on any topic almost without fail. When a tour guide at a farming commune in Hopei province said: “Chairman Mao say water is good for agriculture” our colleague Mairegu could not hold his laughter and retorted: “Peasants in our country also say water is good for agriculture.” We met several high-ranking communist leaders.

At the end of our visit, Lieu Hsiao Chi, the nominal President, later disgraced by the Red Guard, gave us an audience at the Great Hall of the People at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where we were warned to be ware of the Soviet Union, as Moscow had super power appetite. Obviously the competition between the two communist giants for Socialist Ethiopia’s close friendship was intensifying. In the meantime, China as well as the Soviet Union’s proxies in Ethiopia were engaged in a fierce power struggle.

When we arrived back in Addis at the end of January, the Derg was literally split into two camps. Capt. Alemayehu Haile, who became Secretary General during the restructuring process, led the majority faction. Lt. Col. Mengistu, the tiger who led the minority camp was only licking his wounds and waiting for an opportunity to assert his authority. Gen. Teferi was also given more powers as he had clearly backed the majority. Col. Asrat and other moderates who formed the majority of the leadership were considered pro Alemayehu.

On our flight back to Addis, I had asked Colonel Asrat what he thought of the newly re-organised structure of the Derg and he told me that he admired Mengistu's resolute nationalistic stand and that his ambitions for Ethiopia knew no bounds, but some radicals were misleading him and that if there were two or three more like Mengistu, things would look different. Indeed Col. Mengistu impressed almost every one around him, as he seemed to show no interest in personal and material gains.

I sensed that though Asrat would have liked to side with Mengistu, he did not have the stomach for the extremists around the Colonel. Asrat felt that as Mengistu was lured into doctrinaire socialism by those same extremists; his moves were predicated by blind faith for the collective good, sadly, at the expense of individual liberties. I concluded from our discussion that Asrat's belief in the freedom of the individual and his respect for General Teferi had swayed him to be on Alemayehu's side. He did not suspect the fate that awaited him and his like-minded friends.

Towards the end of January 1977, Ato Kifle Wodajo had left for Nairobi accompanied by Ambassador Fitigu to attend a meeting of the OAU Liberation Committee. He was scheduled to meet Gen. Teferi in Dar es Salaam later in the week for the inauguration of President Julius Nyerere's Chama Cha Mapinduzi Party. I was instructed to be part of the delegation and started making travel arrangements.

By collective decision taken at the meeting on January 30 of the newly reorganized Derg, Gen. Teferi was to address the nation on Radio and TV on the night of February 1 and rallies in support of the policy statement were scheduled for the next day. Gen. Teferi's speech was initially prepared in the office of the Derg and was presented to General Teferi for review.

Gen. Teferi felt that the draft speech needed to be recast and instead address issues of national reconciliation. He thus directed Ato Getachew Kibret, the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs to ensure that the necessary changes were included in the final draft. Berhane Deressa, Head of International Department, was in fact supposed to hand-deliver the revised draft and negotiate further changes.

As I arrived at the National Palace that morning to assist in the presentation of credentials by foreign Ambassadors, Ato Getachew and Berhane agreed that, instead of Berhane, who had just come back from the US and was not yet get acquainted with the power structures of the Derg, I should go to the Grand Palace to discuss the changes with Lt. Col. Mengistu, Col. Asrat, Capt. Alemayehu and their close associate Maj. Moges.

As the script was being revised, Maj. Moges, the new Head of Political Affairs of the Derg, agreed with Gen. Teferi's view that the original draft was too radical and did not seem to be persuasive enough to encourage EPRP to join the national reconciliation effort. Though one could see some



consternation on Col. Mengistu's face, his cheeks twitched whenever he was nervous and angry, he yielded to Major Moges's amendments.

In the meantime, Be'alu Girma from the Ministry of Information as well as Hailu Wolde Amanuel from the Foreign Ministry joined the group that should take a final look at the draft. I was also told to translate the final version into English for distribution abroad.

The next day February 2, the planned mass rally was held at Revolution Square ostensibly in support of General Teferi's evening address to the Nation. But as it turned out, after the General addressed the crowd in similar tone, speaker after speaker, organized by MEISON surrogates began condemning the speech. When they wanted to take over the live broadcast of the national radio and were denied access, they quickly arranged their own vehicle mounted with megaphones and started hurling slogans and insults at my friend Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot, with threats of physically hurting him.

After the rally, as the crowd began to disperse, I was worried that they may even assassinate him, a possibility given the series of killings that had already been carried out the previous days and weeks. So, I rushed to my small Fiat car which was parked nearby and picked Tesfaye to get him out of the crowd. Our adversaries knew we were being cautious and as we drove away I left them biting their lips.

On the following day, we all went to work, thinking, naively perhaps, that life was relatively normal. At Derg' Headquarters in the Grand Palace, however, events were taking a different course.

Other individuals, some of them insiders who had first hand information on the events that followed, have written a lot. However, I would like to include in my story what a male typist then working in the Derg's office, Private Mamush, recounted to me later on when we spent time together in the same underground prison cell.

According to Private Mamush, that fateful morning, the Derg, chaired by Gen. Teferi was meeting for their regular morning briefings. Some Executive Committee members were absent on errands they had to accomplish for the day. Notably absent was, Lt. Col. Atnafu who was touring Wellega province. Col. Tesfaye Gebre Kidan who was clearly not aware of the tension that had exploded in the morning and Capt. Fiqre Selassie Wogderess, just recently appointed to head the Campaign for Literacy and Development, were to join their colleagues later.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, as Col. Mengistu excused himself and left the meeting, the door of the meeting room was burst open and the Chief of special operations Col. Daniel, accompanied by Col. Mengistu's loyalists and their body Guard entered the room, told every one there to raise their arms and give themselves up.

Immediately, Col. Daniel had Gen. Teferi, Capt. Alemayehu Haile, Col. Asrat and the other opponents of Mengistu hand-cuffed. As a guard led their victims to the cellars below, Fiqre Selassie was arriving and they forced him too to go into the cellar with the others. Col. Mengistu's exit from the meeting room was apparently the signal for Daniel to move. Col. Berhanu Bayih and the other Mengistu loyalists were of course not among those that were forced into the cellar.

Mamush was convinced that from the movements he had observed during that morning, judging from the general mood that prevailed within the Derg after the mass rally addressed by General Teferi the previous day, Colonels Mengistu and Daniel had secretly worked out a plan on how to liquidate their opponents. As they prepared to have their hostages shot one by one, Col. Daniel immediately realized that Fiqre Selassie was thrown into the cellar by mistake. Fiqre Selassie's life was given a new lease, opening an opportunity for him to take up later on Captain Alemayehu's post of Secretary General of the Military Administrative Council.

Col. Tesfaye Gebre Kidan was spared as he boldly refused to give himself up. After all, though he may or may not have been informed of the plot, he was indeed close to Mengistu. In fact when President Mengistu fled the country in 1990, it was to Col. Tesfaye, later on General, to whom he left his seat of power.

During that day of the purge in 1977, those that were led to the cellar were machine gunned without delay. While all this was going on, the familiar shots that the people of Addis Ababa were used to, from the direction of the Grand Palace and no body seemed to bother.

Lt. Tamrat Wolde Mariam, who after his training at the Moscow Party School was assigned as a political instructor, another prison mate, had also heard repeated gunfire and taken cover within the Palace compound. I remember calling the Information Department of the Derg that morning to inquire what was going on. A young sergeant who picked up the phone told me it was just a small skirmish and that the situation was already under control.

Mamush recounted that after the slaughter of Gen. Teferi and the other moderate members of the Derg, Col. Mengistu, sat with Col. Daniel, Col. Seyoum, Daniel's Deputy and their close adviser Dr. Senay Likke to draw up liquidation strategies reminiscent of Stalin's Russia. As Daniel sent for his not so collaborative assistant, Major Yohannes, who was listed among the first to be eliminated, the corporal who was sent to fetch him did not understand why Yohannes was summoned and did not therefore bother to disarm him. Apparently Maj. Yohannes suspected why he was called to his commander and had no intention to give himself up. First he shot the corporal with the pistol he had carried and then took the machine gun that the corporal had and upon entering Daniel's office he opened fire and shot Col. Daniel and Dr. Senay on the spot. As Col. Seyoum ducked under a table,

Col. Mengistu jumped out of the window, ran to a nearby tank and hid himself there till help arrived. Lt. Col. Mengistu's guard finally killed Maj. Yohannes.

Corporal Begashaw Gurmessa, a Derg member who had apparently not shown enough loyalty to Colonel Mengistu during the purges, was detained with us for some time. Later on, he confirmed Mamush's story. Incidentally, this individual is the only Derg member who was acquitted in 2006 at the mass murder trials in the post Mengistu era.

At lunchtime on that fateful day of February 2, 1977, Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot, our wives Zewditu and Woineshet as well as our friend Tamrat Kebede had met at Ras Hotel for lunch. Later on Woineshet and I went back home to see our small baby Henok, before I could resume my work at the Ministry in the afternoon. Tesfaye went to attend the burial of his colleague Tsegaye Debalqie, Permanent secretary of Culture who was assassinated the previous day.

While Tesfaye was putting a wreath of flowers on the grave of his fallen colleague, a group of Derg commandos, disrespectful of traditional burial rites, simply snatched the wreath from his hands threw it away and arrested him in full view of gathered mourners. Another squad came to the Foreign Ministry as I was working on a document with the Permanent Secretary, Getachew Kibret and called me out and asked if I was carrying any weapons. I showed them my pen and notebook and told them those were all I had. They ordered me to follow them to a Land Cruiser full of heavily

armed soldiers and flanked by those soldiers, I was driven to the Grand Palace.

Before we proceeded to the Land Cruiser, however, on my way out of the Ministry, I handed over all documents I had on me to Maj. Berhanu Jembere, a representative and minder of the Derg who had been assigned to the Ministry since the overthrow of the Emperor. The Major was a man I could trust and he was always good to me. He was shocked to see me surrounded by military security detail and was clearly not aware of what was going on in the Grand Palace.

After we arrived at the Palace, the military intelligence officer ordered me to sit down on the grass in the courtyard. My friend Tesfaye was soon brought to join me. Thereafter, a police cadet, Lt. Tamrat Wolde Mariam, and Gen. Teferi's son Ayneshet, as well as Private Mamush, the male typist who gave me the blow by blow account of what had happened on that morning; Police Captain Mengiste-Ab Bahru; an Airlines employee Legesse Teketel; as well as a driver and a dresser; Corporal Teshome, whose crime was only being assigned to work for the slain Derg members were brought in to join us in our small cell. We also learnt that the Derg had planned to arrest Ato Kifle Wodajo as well, but since he had left for Nairobi in the nick of time, he was fortunate. Many believed that had he been there, Ato Kifle's life would have not been spared.

While this drama was unfolding in Addis Ababa, as Dr. Fitigu was to relate to me later, upon hearing about the events

in Addis, Ato Kifle spent some three agonizing nights locked in a Nairobi hotel. Finally he decided to proceed to Liberia, then to the US. After a prolonged and not so comfortable transit in Liberia, he was granted political asylum in the US. Ato Kifle Wodajo returned to Ethiopia only after the overthrow of the military regime and served as parliamentarian, key participant in the drafting of Ethiopia's new federal constitution and Chairman of the Electoral Board. When he died of sudden illness in a South African hospital in May 2005, he was still serving as an independent adviser to the EPRDF government. His Alma Mater, Addis Ababa University honoured him with a doctorate degree, *Honoris Causa*, a year before he died.

Ato Kifle was mentor to generations of diplomats, including Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin of the post-Mengistu era, UN Under-Secretary General Berhanu Dinka and myself. When it came to writing speeches, preparing strategy papers and legal drafts, Ato Kifle Wodajo was the one person I knew, to borrow a phrase from Oscar Wilde, "whose taste was simple; he could only be satisfied with the best". When I met him a few months before he died, Ato Kifle confided in me that unlike his detractors, he believed he was working for his country and was making an effort at damage control in his own chosen way. I have always respected him.

Back to that fateful day in February 1977, as dusk fell, those of us who were rounded up earlier in the day were told to line up and march to the back of the Palace and enter its

infamous cellars. Upon arrival, we had to take off our shoes, belts and all items that the soldiers considered dangerous. A very sympathetic army officer, Maj. Bekele read to us the rules. Immediately seven of us were locked into a tiny room of three by three and a half meters.

As we entered our little cell, we noticed in the adjacent halls, former ministers of the Crown who had been spared of the mass execution in December 1974 but were nevertheless held as political prisoners. Former Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru; Minister in Prime Minister's Office Dr. Seyoum Haregot; Development Bank General Manager Ato Assefa Demissie and others were standing at the entrance. They helplessly looked at us in awe as they had already been told not to communicate with us. The same rules applied for us when new prisoners arrived. That was perhaps the longest night in my entire life and I could not help wondering how in the midst of our misfortune my friend Tesfaye could sleep so blissfully like a baby. The rest of us spent the night wondering what the next day will bring.

Next morning, early at five, a prison warder opened the door to our cell and told us it was time to relieve ourselves at the toilets close by. To our surprise the shower rooms and toilets were impeccably clean and some of us in fact rushed to take a shower. After refreshing ourselves we were again locked back into our little cell. The first night was over and we felt lucky to have been left alive and see the light of another day.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Years of Hell, Years of Reflection*

As dawn broke on February 27, 1977 we could only guess what was to happen next. In any case, our first night in prison had passed without any further activity regarding our fate. We could hear cars coming and leaving the courtyard of the military clinic close by when finally a yellow Volkswagen mini bus entered our compound at about mid-day and through the key hole door I could see my distinctly red luggage among the pile of items in the van. I then figured that our wives have already been informed about our imprisonment and were told to send us clothes, beddings and food.

The Derg had suspended food allowances to its political prisoners, reportedly heeding to a sinister advice of their erstwhile radical friends, Dr. Negede Gobeze et al, who in fact had urged in one of their publications earlier that it would be a waste of resources to feed political prisoners. It was clear then that they were party to the decision by the Derg to eliminate political opponents. Thus, every prisoner had to have food brought from his own home and await his/her fate.

Early in the morning, as the other prisoners got their daily papers, in the adjacent cell, we could hear Mulugeta Asrate, son of Ras Asrate Kassa reading loudly newspaper stories of the events that had taken place the previous day. Gen. Teferi along with seven other top officials had been liquidated and that “the revolution had advanced from defence to attack”. Lt.

Col. Mengistu was named Chairman and took absolute control. For us it was a repeat news item since Private Mamush had already told us the whole story.

Towards the end of the day, after a loud pro-Mengistu rally at the Revolution Square near by, we were once again permitted to take fresh air for a few minutes and let out of our cell. Maj. Bekele came and read us our “rights” and duties as political prisoners.

We were allowed daily government newspapers paid for from money they had emptied out of our pockets the previous day, we could also write to our families daily, but only four lines and in clear messages. He told us that henceforth, as political prisoners and until such time that a different directive was issued, we were not allowed to communicate with the other political prisoners in the adjacent cells, the former officials of the Imperial regime.

Nevertheless, our senior prison mates could secretly communicate with us and they always left a kettle of boiled water at our door for us to make our own tea. They were allowed to use a small stove outside and we were not.

When those former officials were let out for the habitual one-hour sunshine and fresh air, we were locked in. We could breathe fresh air and take small walks in the compound only in shifts. When a blue Mercedes mini bus brought bags of food every morning that had been delivered by our families at the gate, our designated colleagues would also take bags,

food containers and laundry of the previous day back to our families.

This went on for about two months when one rainy afternoon we were ordered to transfer to another more isolated villa within the palace grounds that overlooked the former meeting hall of the Cabinet on one side and St. Gabriel's Church on the other side.

Meanwhile within the core of the Derg, Chairman Mengistu continued to nurture a parallel power-base, composed mainly of non-commissioned officers. First he made sure that the non-commissioned officers who demonstrated unflinching loyalty were given quick training and elevated to the rank of lieutenant. He also included in this hardcore parallel power base some of the line officers that blindly followed him.

The struggle between the different so-called Marxist-Leninist groups who had mushroomed around the Derg was intensifying further and a series of arrests and liquidations were taking place. There was also the war with Somalia which Ato Kifle's paper had predicted a couple of years back that some factions did not support whole-heartedly.

As the Carter administration refused to deliver the arms Ethiopia had paid for, the US Embassy was told to reduce the number of its staff in Ethiopia and close all technical advisory offices and military base that were hitherto serving as links for the long standing US Ethiopian cooperation.

The new Chairman then publicly condemned China in his determination to prove his unquestioning acceptance of Soviet supremacy. Moscow, though still suspicious, was clearly happy to abandon Somalia and side with Ethiopia, the bigger catch. The regional and national political climate was heavily charged and alliances shifted dramatically.

Soon, Chairman Mengistu was invited to a series of visits to the Soviet Union and its satellite states to seal the newly formed alliance. During his ground breaking visit to Moscow, the Chairman was kept waiting for long at the corridors of the Kremlin before he could see Leonid Brezhnev. He later on flew to Cuba, as guest of Fidel Castro.

In the long absence of Chairman Mengistu, many people, including our prison Guard were not so sure who really was in control. The reign of terror continued unabated. At our prison, our young fellow detainees would be called unexpectedly and never return after they were taken for what was supposedly routine interrogation. Maj. Berhanu Kebede, successor to Col. Daniel as Chief of Derg Security Operations would call any one and eliminate him or her as he wished. Even members of the Derg were reportedly shaking in his presence. I knew his Brother, Captain Assefa Kebede, an army officer educated in Poona, India who served as public relations liaison of the Imperial Body Guard during the last days of the Emperor.

On one occasion, just as the day was getting darker, I was summoned to the Investigation Office within the compound of the Derg Headquarters. I thought that was my last day alive. Usually, inmates called out at such an ominous hour never came back. Thus, I bid farewell to my friend Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot and other prison mates and proceeded to where the interrogators were waiting.

There, a young corporal reluctantly started asking me my name, my age and where I was working before I was arrested. While I was responding to that seemingly casual interrogation, Maj. Berhanu Kebede, the notorious killer entered the room and intervened and asked whether I was Teferra Shiawl of the Foreign Ministry. I confirmed and asked him how his brother Assefa was doing. He then asked where in hell I knew his brother. I was visibly angry and retorted that Assefa was my friend. That brief encounter with Maj. Berhanu may have saved my life because he respectfully told me to go back to my cell. As I returned to my friends, Tesfaye was so relieved that he could not help his emotions.

Despite such disconcerting events, our guards there were friendly and the isolated location of the villa was conducive for surreptitious discussions with the soldiers on guard duty without their supervisors prying. They up-dated us on what was going on in town, including briefing us on the inevitable fall from favour of those radicals that were close advisers to the Derg.

After a few weeks we were brought back to the cellar of the Grand Palace and last permitted to mix with the former officials. That was a relief, as we then got the chance to meet old friends and acquaintances.

We immediately set about to plan our daily lives. There was a wealth of knowledge inside those prison walls and we decided to make the best out of our time there. In the pack, there were scientists, economists, historians, religious leaders, academicians, diplomats and seasoned civil servants.

It was an opportunity for us younger ones to closely know senior personalities such as Yilma Deressa, father of Ethiopia's post World War Two economic and financial transformation; Blatten Geta Mahateme Selassie, a noted writer, Bitwoded Zawde Gebre Heywot, President of the Senate; Ketema Yifru, the youngest Foreign Minister Ethiopia has ever had and co-architect of the OAU; Lij Kassa Wolde Mariam, Minister of Agriculture and former President of Haile Selassie I University, Asnaqe Getachew, a seasoned agricultural economist; Dr. Haile Ghiorgis Worqneh, scientist and former Lord Mayor of Addis Ababa; Liqe Silttanat Aba Habte Mariam, an articulate theologian; Ato Tadesse Yaqob, a historian educated in France and Israel and retired Civil Service Commissioner; Dr. Seyoum Haregot, a Harvard lawyer and long time Minister in the Prime Minister's Office; Ato Mamo Tadesse, a former Minister of Finance educated at Sorbonne; Teshome Gebre Mariam, a flamboyant McGill Law School graduate and former Minister of State of Mines; Gorfu Gebre Medhin, Swedish educated economist, Maj.

Admasseh Zeleqe an army communications engineer and MP; Ato Menassie Lemma, former Governor of the National Bank and Assefa Demissie, another economist and Director of the Development Bank, to name a few.

Between them, those illustrious sons of Ethiopia had unmatched cumulative experience and a wealth of knowledge that could sustain at least two more countries on the continent. Their lifelong experience, knowledge and service did not count at all as far our jailers were concerned.

As books were allowed in with practically no censorship, our senior prison mates had plenty of reading material. Derg censors would allow without hesitation any books that bore the name of Lenin or Marx or had scientific socialism, economics, social science or history topics or even the name Russia for that matter, regardless of content. Tolstoy's "War and Peace"; Solzhenitsyn's "Gulag Archipelago" and other useful books were there to be read. They even unwittingly allowed us to read George Orwell's "1984" and "Animal Farm", the title which seemed to suggest to them agriculture and dairy farming.

Outside the prison gates the draconian directives religiously followed by the regime's cadres allowed into the country only literature that toed the Soviet line. Following the closure of the USIS and the American Library in 1978, a zealous member of the Information Ministry recommended that all western books should be burnt. This was too much for University Professor Aleme Eshete, a lone voice that dared.

He publicly confronted the official and exposed the preposterous nature of that idea. Fortunately the book burning did not happen.

In what was thought to be a relatively safe location at the height of the Red Terror campaign, Tesfaye and I used our time in the Grand Palace cellar prison to read, learn and teach. I concentrated on learning French, with Ato Mamo Tadesse being my tutor. Major Admasseh taught some of us Basic Principles of Electronics and in exchange, I taught German. My best students in turn were Mamo Tadesse, Ahadu Sabure, Worqu Mekasha, Abetew Gebre Yesus, Asnaqe Getachew and Capt. Mengiste-Ab. Later I learnt some Spanish and Arabic.

Tesfaye, besides helping our younger colleagues with their English and other subjects, did several translations of useful books. Our enriched writing and language skills were to open high-level international job opportunities for us later on. More than any thing else, the close interaction with those senior Ethiopians was in itself the best educational opportunity for younger political detainees.

Sometimes, I would also do some pencil sketches and drawings. Tesfaye and Ayneshet encouraged me to continue to refine my drawing skills and they posed for me. Soon I would get almost any prisoner as a model and some like, Tesfaye, Ketema Yifru, Lij Kassa Wolde Mariam and Ato Teshome Gebre Mariam, always armed with positive disposition, would serve as my constructive art critics. I was



also asked to begin a drawing class. It was not easy to follow on Maitre Afeworq Tekle's footsteps, but under the circumstances, and as long as such activity detracted participants from their daily worries, I was happy to provide relief from our collective misery with my share of distraction.

One day, as I was drawing the sketch of a handsome General and an old acquaintance, Samuel Beyene, all onlookers were agreed that the picture looked perfect. Sammy, as many of us used to call him, was a very resourceful person and he immediately contacted a soldier on Guard duty and sent a message to his family to send him the next day, a collapsible table, chair and a set of drawing pencils and water colour.

Gen. Samuel got all the material I needed and gave them to me on only one condition, that since he never had any family portrait, I should include the pictures of his wife and children to be copied from photographs he already had. I gladly agreed and that work took me well over a month, with my usual critics helping me to improve all the time.

After the watercolour painting on a rather large parchment like thick paper was completed, Sammy had it smuggled out to his family. His wife got it photographed and printed in London as a post card. She then sent the cards to us for Christmas. Sammy was happy, so was I.

Long after the death of Gen. Samuel at the hands of Derg executioners and following my release from prison, I met

General Samuel's daughter, Aida, in 1991 at a private party, and, as I noticed who she was from my recollection of having painted her image, I asked her where they kept the picture. She said her Mom had kept it safely in America so that if one day the artist came to claim it they would hand it over. I told her I was that artist and assured her they could keep the picture as my gift to the family.

Following the month of May 1978, as the war with Somalia was intensifying, the senior supervisors of the palace prison came and asked Abuna Theophilos to hand over the big golden cross that the Patriarch habitually carried. Liqe Silttanat Aba Habte Mariam also had such cross. He too was asked to surrender his cross. Perhaps, we assumed, the Derg thought that while a nation-wide campaign for fund raising to strengthen the revolutionary war effort was under way, they found it unacceptable that those two religious leaders carried such valuable items. The Patriarch readily surrendered his cross.

Aba Habte Mariam, however, went back to the prison cell, and as he soon came out, I saw him dressed up in his ceremonial gown, his cross wrapped in a small Ethiopian flag ribbon and watched him go to the barbed wire fence gate and resolutely tell the soldiers that he was not willing to surrender his cross, no matter the consequences. The soldiers retreated and never came back to put similar demands. The comparison in the strength of resolve between the Patriarch and Aba Habte was not lost to the rest of us.

Notwithstanding this, the Patriarch was among the first people who the special security commandoes called out on those dark days of June 1979, took to a villa in the suburbs of Addis where they were strangled to death. As he was led out of the palace cellar, Patriarch Theophilos blessed us all and bid us his final bye. Many of the prisoners were in tears as he was led away, we all knew our lives hung on a thin thread and any one of us could be the next victim.

As witnesses were to confess later during trials of Derg officials in the late 1990s, the remains of the Patriarch and those of other victims were found in a mass grave in the compound of a villa that once belonged to Ras Kassa. Aba Habte survived to later on take the name Abuna Melke Tsedeq and eventually immigrate to the United States.

In late 1978, the schism between the Derg and Dr. Haile Fida's group had widened and news about some of the closest advisers of the Derg like Tesfaye Tadesse Wolde Medhin whose activities were no longer being published in the government papers that they had earlier dominated. One morning, when I was in charge of receiving our food bags, I bumped onto four or five extra bags that the soldiers had deliberately included with those of ours.

That was their way of informing us who had been arrested lately and thrown into the dungeon nearby. As was always the case, this time too I read out loudly the names: "Haile Fida, Tigist Adane, etc." and asked if these bags could please be claimed. The other prisoners got the message. All of us knew

then that those once very powerful advisers of the Derg had at long last fallen out of favour. Shortly after this, we were told that they were in fact taken to a detention centre at the Fourth Army Division Headquarters to join other prisoners to await their fate.

Not too long after that incident, we read in the Government papers that Berhane Mesqel Redda and his EPRP associates had been apprehended in Wello and brought to Addis as prisoners. Legal procedures have seldom been a habit of the Derg any ways, and without much waiting both MEISON and EPRP leaderships were liquidated at about the same time. We knew we did not always see eye to eye with either of them, but felt rather sorry that our generation of Ethiopians had to go through such self-destructing process. It was indeed a very grim period.

As I was checking our food packages on one other day, containers bearing the name of Zewditu, Tesfaye's wife were among the items. I could not believe my eyes. Certain that she must have been imprisoned in the so called red terror drive at the instigation of our adversaries, I immediately concealed the containers so that Tesfaye would not see them till I had devised some means of breaking the story to him. Zewditu was working in Ethiopian Airlines and she was the only supporter of the family. Their children, Tsinu and Arki, that later on grew up to be accomplished academics of Yale and Columbia Universities respectively, were barely one and two years old.

While I knew I also had my share of misfortune with a wife that was unemployed and no one would dare employ because I was a political prisoner, Zewditu's predicament tore my heart. I knew her as kind, caring and always supportive to all who know her.

Though I was greatly disturbed, I kept my suspicion of her arrest to myself until we received a letter that she herself wrote telling us she was, in-deed, all right. All those weeks, Tamrat Kebede and her father Ato Tesfaye Tequame, a retired Palace photographer, had taken custody of the children. For more than six weeks, the four line letters were all the time written by Tamrat who did not want us to worry and pretended all was well.

During one of our morning walks, I took Tesfaye aside and told him what I thought might have happened. Woineshet could be next. He locked himself in the toilet room for what seemed a very long time and came out breathing heavily with rage and with his eyes wet, but his strong willpower stayed intact.

It was only after our release two and a half years later that we learnt of the full extent of abuse and suffering that Zewditu had to endure at the hands Derg cadres. From the accounts of how they treated her, it was a miracle she survived. She was arrested in full view of the public while waiting for a bus to take her to her Ethiopian Airlines office. If her jailers had their way they would have killed her, had it

not been for the constant intercession and pleading of well connected friends like Tamrat Kebede.

A young corporal, Molla Zegeye, was more humane than his colleagues and at Tamrat Kebede's constant plea, helped a great deal to avert the worst that could have happened. Zewditu's jailers had first taken her to a near by eucalyptus forest and were firing their automatic guns left and right, simply to terrorize her into confessing any connection she might have had with what were described as anti-revolutionary elements. She was strong and survived the ordeal, but came out so skinny having suffered considerable weight loss.

The six weeks Zewditu spent as prisoner in the filthiest and most crowded prison near the airport were clearly the worst days of her life. Her father and her mother Mama Mersha, who both alternated between two prisons carrying food for us to the Grand Palace and to Zewditu's notorious district jail near the airport, never got tired. Their love and loyalty was immense.

Woineshet too was harassed constantly but left in relative peace to care for our children and perform her daily routine of feeding her imprisoned husband. Besides, her father retired Brigadier General Kebede Wagaye and my loyal childhood friends Getachew and Bedilu, as well as our unfailing friends Sahlitu Ketsela and her husband Solomon Berhanu, were always checking her out. She was however forced to abandon our comfortable apartment in favour of a woman connected to

some higher ups. She settled in a tiny studio apartment nearby and did not inform me of this until we were released.

Apart from the imprisonment and terror that Derg cadres meted out on Zewditu, they literally turned both our homes upside down without any search warrant, as they always did. They threw out as garbage our valued books and documents that we had accumulated for years.

In 1978, almost one year after our detention at the height of the power struggle within the Derg, Col. Atnaфу was executed, accused of deviating from scientific socialism. He had argued, at one of the Derg meetings, for a system of mixed economy, vowing that communism would never materialise in Ethiopia in his lifetime. That was a tragic act on the part of the Derg, especially when one considered that the Derg itself was to advance, ten years later, the same notion that Col. Atnaфу espoused.

Atnaфу was in fact liquidated because he was reportedly not comfortable with Soviet intrusiveness in Ethiopia's affairs, openly condemning their system and it was obviously known that his increasing popularity among those who shared the same outlook must have posed a serious threat to the Chairman. The Soviets had made sure that Mengistu's hard line Marxist supporters within the Derg were pushed to the limits of their tolerance of Atnaфу.

After Atnaфу's execution, the parallel power group within the Derg that Col. Mengistu had created seemed to be in full

control. While the Chairman was away in Havana, one beautiful morning in March 1979 and when all seemed quiet, a soldier called out our cellmates Ayneshet and Lt. Tamrat Wolde Mariam. Our unfortunate colleagues thought that they were being summoned for routine questioning. They never returned.

At the Grand Palace, it was becoming routine for prisoners to be called out by the Regime's henchmen for supposedly harmless interrogation. Those that were called out never came back to their prison cells.

They were simply exterminated, Gulag style. The pain for many of us left to live for a day was being forced to constantly ask ourselves, would I be next? The mental torture at the gates of hell seemed eternal. The prospect of survival and entering in to a new dawn in life seemed only a distant dream.

The phenomenon of sudden calls by Derg and the subsequent disappearance of prisoners continued after Chairman Mengistu returned from Havana. Patriarch Abuna Theophilos, the frail former Minister of Pen Teferra Worq Kidane Wold; former Mayor of Asmara, Dejazmatch Haregot Abay; Education Minister Seifu Mahateme Selassie; Agriculture Minister and Former University President Dejazmatch Kassa Wolde Mariam; the Emperor's Private Secretary Ato Yohannes Kidane Mariam; Welfare Foundation Director Ato Abebe Kebede; his close friend Ato Assefa Defaye and Gen. Samuel Beyene were all called out



one by one over a period of a few days and they never came back.

As the names of the wanted prisoners were called out, Dejazmatch Kassa Wolde Mariam, upon hearing his name, took off his wrist watch and handed it to his friend Ashenafi Shifferaw telling him he did not need it any more. After they were taken, we were only told that they had “changed prisons”, meaning they were eliminated. We were instructed to hand over their belongings to the guard.

I could not really understand, nor has any of the ordinary Derg members been able to tell us later on, why, after five years of prison ordeal, the leadership decided to liquidate without any semblance of judicial process elderly and totally helpless political prisoners who had rendered invaluable service to their country. It certainly was not and cannot by any standards be described as revolutionary justice. The crime of the victims of such an act, carried out with impunity, was perhaps their having grown prosperous in a feudal monarchy and having signed a petition requesting release.

As we were to learn later on, this swift but unexpected disappearance of the Patriarch and the other notable prisoners prompted the families to tell the BBC that, as their food was turned back, they were anxious about the lives of their loved ones. Their fears came true. After the demise of the Derg years later, the world was treated to horrible sights of mass graves where those once respected sons of Ethiopia were buried.

While we were languishing in the cellars of the Grand Palace, the terror meted out on other prisoners through out the country was no different, perhaps even worse. Life for the people of Ethiopia, and particularly for our families, in towns and villages was growing unbearable from day to day.

Arbitrary arrests and spontaneous killings, fear, intimidation - in short all the worst forms of human rights abuse and violations were the order of the day. The agony that our families had to endure were compounded by the sight of dead bodies left to rot on the streets of Addis, unless families of those victims paid specified sums of money to be allowed to bury their dead. The regime continued to extract blood and tears from a helpless population.

In contrast, while the general public was being treated to the gruesome spectacle of piled up bodies of those who were summarily executed on the streets of cities and towns, we were fortunately not treated to that show for reason of our confinement within the cellars of the Grand Palace. We nevertheless tried to have some lighter moments.

Dejazmatch Girmachew, Ketema Yifru, Gorfu Gebre Medhin, Teshome Gebre Mariam, General Lencha and other notables in my side of the prison hall, and, Ahadu Sabure, Balambaras Zerfu, a very witty former district governor and Major Admasseh Zeleqe, in Tesfaye's corner of the hall, would bring up some nice stories and jokes or act in a manner that would amuse the rest of us.

Tesfaye and I always wondered why during harmless discussions some of our older prison mates some times quarrelled bitterly over their pieces of land that had already been nationalized by a decree of the Derg. But again, that was human nature.

Prisoners are great dreamers and we were no exception. Every morning we shared what we dreamt the previous night and the elderly colleagues were also eager to interpret the dreams that most often centred on our eventual release. Balambaras Zerfu, a former district Governor, was the “expert” in the interpretation of dreams.

Common worships on Sundays and on holidays presided over by Patriarch Theophilos, Aba Habte Mariam and Nebure Id Ermias, a seasoned cleric with the most humble and beautiful voice, provided solace to most prisoners as he sang praises to the Lord Almighty.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *Exit From The Dungeon*

The prison routine at the Grand Palace continued till July 17, 1979 when the commandant of our prison, Major Simye, appeared early in the morning and read out several names of those prisoners that were complaining of different kinds of ailments who were known to frequent the nearby clinic. As he was reading the names, some of us thought that they were being taken to hospital for further checkups, or even worse, to their death that the Guard euphemistically preferred to as “other prisons.

As the Commandant went on reading, Tesfaye’s name and mine had been added at the bottom of the list, and, to allay any fears of some worse fate, the Sergeant standing close by winked and told me with simple eye contact that all was well and not to worry. Thus, all those of us whose names were read out were informed that we should pack our belongings and leave them there, as they would be sent to us later.

Meanwhile Tesfaye was asleep and I had to wake him up and tell him the good news. He apparently did not believe this and since we always suspected the worst, he told me that he would not be rushed to his death although I told him this could be our day of liberation. He thus took his time to prepare to come out and join the rest of us. We were then told to line up and march towards the parade ground not far from the palace cellars.

As we reached there, another officer read out our names again, carefully, one by one, and told us to hop into an open Volvo jeep. At that moment, he approached the soldier that had accompanied us from our prison up to the parade grounds and told him: “These gentlemen are to be released today and you will accompany them to the First Army Division Headquarters and leave them there, where they will be given some orientation.” I remember how that soldier breathed a big sigh of relief. Apparently he must have thought that we were yet another batch of political prisoners condemned for slaughter and that, fortunately, was not the case. Tesfaye and I quietly shook hands while still in the jeep.

When we arrived at the First Army Division Headquarters at Sidist Kilo, we were politely ushered into a big meeting hall and seated alongside other elderly prisoners that had also been called out of their cells at the Fourth Army Division Headquarters, most of whom, like the ones from the Grand Palace, had a history of medical problems. These included the seventy-year-old niece of the late Emperor, Princess Yeshash Worq Yilma.

The orientation was brief and focused only on the developments that had taken place in the course of the revolution, the defeat of MEISON and EPRP parties in the struggle, and of course the achievements of the revolution “under the resolute leadership of Comrade Mengistu”. All Derg members and civilian officials were now referred to as “Comrade”.

After the orientation, a young officer approached Tesfaye and me to verify our identity and told us we would soon be contacted by what he called “upper bodies”, meaning higher authorities. Thus, after nearly three years of confinement, we walked freely and penniless wondering how the outside would look like. Our wives, who were informed of our release, had apparently thought that we would still be at the Grand palace awaiting transport, only to be told that we had been taken to another location. That, of course, caused some anxiety.

Before our families came to fetch us at Sidist Kilo, one of our prison colleagues, General Lencha Meles, had already offered to give us a ride in a car that had come for him and dropped us off at Piazza, where we were to finally meet with our wives and children.

As I knocked on my apartment door, I found that someone else had occupied it. While I was trying to absorb my dismay at the situation, the new tenants kindly showed me a nearby small studio apartment to where my family had relocated. There, I met my children and my wife joined us soon afterwards. We hugged each other, with our sons Marcos and Henok in between, for the longest hug I could remember. I could not control my emotions and could feel tears running down my eyes, not to speak of Woineshet’s endless sobbing.

Zewditu had also come from work and joined Tesfaye with Tsinu and Arki, who were immediately brought over

from their grand parents. All our friends and family members came over the course of that day, and in the following days to celebrate with our two close families what we thought was our exit from hell.

That night, as Woineshet and I were quietly trying to digest the day's events, we could hear our two little boys whispering to each other. We stopped our conversation and simply continued to listen to them. That was perhaps the most beautiful sound. We both thanked the stars.

Upon hearing the good news about our release, my close colleague Berhanu Dinka and Hirut Befeqadu brought me all the backlog copies of Time, Newsweek and Africa magazines, accumulated over nearly three years. I got a lot of reading material to catch up on world events that had unfolded in the years of our absence from the jobs that we had enjoyed. Our two loyal friends in the military establishment, Majors Girma Yilma and Fisseha Geda were also among the first ones to come and visit us after our release.

While we were in prison, lots of things had changed in the country at large and in the Foreign Ministry in particular. Colonel Dr. Feleqe Gedle Ghiorgis, a police officer trained in Communist Yugoslavia was named Minister. Though Feleqe was endowed with basic native instinct, he had to learn the hard way the art of diplomacy while at the same time trying to assert his leadership over an elite group of diplomats. My

job was not available, of course, as an army officer had taken over as Chief of Press of the Foreign Ministry.

The general situation in the country was already deteriorating and the management style of the new Minister, compounded by the general fear that gripped the country, had angered Fitigu and several of our colleagues so much so that they, like many Ethiopians, chose to go into exile. Despite the difficult working conditions that prevailed, Berhanu Dinka and a few other strong willed colleagues continued to soldier on.

There was also quite a considerable change in the Information Ministry. Be'alu Girma had already taken over as Permanent Secretary. Clearly, under the circumstances, both Tesfaye and I would not be sent back to our respective posts.

As we were contemplating on what to do next to sustain the livelihoods of our families, a call came through from the Palace one early November morning. Earlier on, US-educated Major Dawit Wolde Ghiorgis, who was the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs then, had informed me of this possibility. Tesfaye had also been informed through other sources and we prepared ourselves to be received in audience by the Head of State.

During the course of that afternoon, Tesfaye and I were ushered into Chairman Mengistu's Grand Palace office separately, one after the other. I entered first and Chairman Mengistu spontaneously hugged me like a dear friend that



had gone missing for years. I could not help smiling at the sudden twist of fate. As I sat down, he started to speak at length on recent developments in Ethiopia's political, social and economic life.

In a discussion that lasted nearly one hour and a half, the Chairman laid out, from his own perspective, the full story of the protracted political struggle within the Derg and with the Country's external enemies. His mastery of details was striking. He then went on to ask me if I knew why I was imprisoned. I told him that my crime was only serving a country and people I loved dearly. He immediately admitted that this was indeed what he had thought, but that certain elements that were not around any more had misled him. He was very candid about the whole affair.

He then hinted that perhaps my close friendship with Colonel Asrat was the reason behind the mistaken belief that I may have joined the anti-revolutionary camp. I told him about the private conversation I had with Asrat on our way back from China, only a few days before the latter was executed. I recounted to him how Asrat had very favourably commented on the Chairman's leadership and character. I then emphasized that it would be unfair if the feelings I knew of my fallen friend had not been brought to the Chairman's knowledge.

Chairman Mengistu then looked down at the table and took what seemed a very long pause before he commented on what I told him. He then said: "You know, for me too Asrat

was a close friend. We were all confused at the time and we did not simply realize what we were doing. We had gone crazy. As for you, tell me what I can do to compensate for our mistake.”

At this point, I had to force out the diplomat in me to respond to this seemingly generous offer, and, I said: “Chairman, history has now absolved me and there is no better compensation than a Head of State admitting that a mistake was made.” He was obviously happy at my response and went on to explain with great enthusiasm, about his program to establish the Workers’ Party of Ethiopia and the need to set up a Commission that would work out the structures before the party could be formally launched.

I took it that he was asking me to join a group of technocrats to assist him in this task. He thought my contribution would enhance better approach in designing a constructive foreign policy. He gave me the impression that Ethiopia was at last heading towards an all-inclusive system. I was soon to discover yet again that I had failed to gauge the intensity of his blind adhesion to doctrinaire Socialism.

As a young student in Germany, I was a strong supporter of the social democrats. I had always believed that a social democratic approach represented a good alternative also for Ethiopia. The Chairman then repeatedly assured me that I, like all members of the group, would have direct access to him and would no more be threatened with the kind of power

layers that were responsible for my misfortune of the past three years.

As Chairman Mengistu was talking to me, I was reflecting on my days in the dungeons of the Grand Palace. Even after my release from that prison, the situation in which I had found my wife and our two little boys had indeed bled my heart. I had already learnt a bitter lesson in those three horrible years. I have never contemplated leaving my country and go into exile, come what may, I felt I had to agree. As I left his office after the discussion, it was Tesfaye's turn for the same kind of briefing that lasted equally long.

Three days later, we were again invited to the Chairman's office, this time along with other persons selected to serve in the Commission for Organizing the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, COPWE. We found out that all the key players in the past three years that had rendered valuable and critical services to Colonel Mengistu were included. There were also a few old faces, like Colonel Embibel Ayele, by far the most efficient military technocrat, who we knew had served under Defence Ministers of the imperial regime and later on under the two late Chairmen of the Derg.

The entire group was a mixture of civilians, military cadres and few survivors from the original Derg. By this time, the total membership of the Derg has dwindled from the original one hundred twenty to about sixty, and, given the increasing power of the Chairman, the attrition was

continuing. Perhaps Tesfaye and I were the only odd persons out.

As the meeting was in preparation for our trip to Moscow, Chairman Mengistu started with a brief review of party formation history; with full of praises for the achievements of the party of Lenin that he believed was the model that a future Workers Party of Ethiopia should follow. I was sceptical at his naivety but listened to him with interest as he emphasized his confidence that there will be a great deal to learn from the Soviets. He said he had made arrangements with the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party for the Commission members to tour the USSR and meet party officials at various levels in different regions to learn first-hand and on the ground from their “tested” experiences.

Such visits were dubbed as “visits for the exchange of experiences”, although, clearly, we had no party history, nor party formation experience, we could give back to the Soviets in exchange. We could perhaps share with them experiences from Ethiopia’s rich history of guarding our independence, culture and traditions.

After a week’s preparation, the group travelled to Russia and was welcomed upon arrival in Moscow by the tall and handsome party apparatchik, Anatoly Sharayev. Sharayev spoke impeccable Amharic, just like a native Amhara. I knew him during the days of the Imperial regime when he was an official of the Soviet Permanent Exhibition in Addis Ababa and was declared *Persona Non Grata*, because he was found

carrying out “activities not compatible with normal diplomatic duties”, the euphemism for his being caught red-handed in espionage.

At the Party Hotel in Moscow, where we took up residence for the next six weeks, Sharayev brought in lecturers that gave us long hours of orientation *ad nauseum*, on party organization, Soviet style. In between we would be flown to historical cities and places of interest such as the birthplace of the October Revolution, Leningrad, now rebaptized with its Czarist name St. Petersburg. We also visited Frunze in Kyrgyz Republic, Sverdlovsk in Central Russia, Gorky near Moscow and Vilnius in Lithuania. In the evenings we would be treated to shows and concerts at the Bolschoi Theatre and to ice hockey games. During one of the ice hockey tournaments we were among the select few spectators as the aging Leonid Brezhnev walked in like a robot, flanked by senior party officials to watch a match.

Sharayev served both as an interpreter and minder wherever we went. I did not wish to remind Sharayev of his past in Ethiopia, but his intrusive and domineering posture forced me to tell him a story I had heard from my elderly prison mate Dejazmatch Girmachew. The story related to incidents in Ethiopia’s continued attempt at asserting an independent existence. Dejazmatch Girmachew’s father, Fitawrari Tekle Hawariyat, had studied in Czarist Russia and my respected friend knew a lot about relations with Russia, past and present.

According to that story, a certain Colonel Leonitiev was dispatched by the Russian Czar to visit Ethiopia at the height of the scramble for Africa by European powers. Russia had wanted to use the common Orthodox Christian religion to get a foothold in Ethiopia and Leonitiev's mission was to convince Emperor Menelik to forge an even closer relationship following Russian Red Cross assistance to Ethiopian fighters during the battle of Adwa in 1896.

Emperor Menelik, it was said, listened attentively to the message brought by Leonitiev and told him that since it was the wish of our Russian friends to modernize Ethiopia, he would appoint him, Leonitiev, “Dejazmatch” (leader of the campaign) and send him off to Maji, south west Ethiopia, so he could “civilize” that region.

Those days Maji was a far away territory and one would have to traverse difficult terrain and malaria-infested thick forests to reach there. Leonitiev apparently lost many of his entourage on the way and the challenge of civilizing that part of Ethiopia was insurmountable for him. To this day, elderly Ethiopians refer to that region as *Dejazmatch Wolenteff's country*, meaning Leonitiev's territory. Leonitiev was the Russian official who escorted Dejazmatch Girmachew's father to Russia when the latter went to Petrograd to study in the Military Academy.

Our friend Sharayev then said: “Comrade Teferra, now I got your message; do you mean we should not try to be too much involved in Ethiopia, lest we may not succeed?” I

noded in agreement. After that incident he was gentler in handling the delegation. The Ethiopian Ambassador at the time, Colonel Nessibu Taye, a close friend of the Chairman, was also not so appreciative of Sharayev's style and the two often exchanged harsh words publicly.

Captain Legesse Asfaw, who had risen from Master Sergeant to Lieutenant and shortly afterwards to the rank of Captain, apparently led the parallel power base of the Chairman within the Derg and was as such designated to head the delegation. His Deputy was Colonel Teka Tulu. This may sound bizarre to those accustomed to respect of hierarchy in the armed forces.

Captain Legesse was totally dedicated to the Chairman. At the height of the Red Terror he had proven beyond doubt his unquestioning loyalty to Chairman Mengistu as his special commissar to oversee the governance of Addis Ababa. Though a meticulous note taker and learner endowed with native intelligence, he would never dare make any decision unless he felt it would please his boss. Apparently that served President Mengistu's power game very well.

In the new order therefore, military hierarchy was not important. We all remember that General Aman Andom lost his life among other reasons, because of this very issue. It was the loyalty to the Chairman and the role that the individual had played in helping consolidate Colonel Mengistu's power that really mattered. While in Moscow, Tesfaye and I could notice the docility of the line officer

members of the group and their total submission to the command of their former subordinates.

The delegation was divided into two groups with each one assigned different tasks. Tesfaye and I were assigned to work under the chairmanship of Shimelis Mazengia, a young speechwriter, an avid reader and a fast learner, as rapporteurs. Shimelis had abandoned EPRP early enough and was in good standing with the Chairman.

As we were settling down in our rooms every evening to evaluate the day's work, I cautioned my colleagues to speak in general terms as I felt that the protruding items in the walls could be hidden microphones designed to bug the occupants. We agreed and every time we started to discuss politics we would point to those microphones and say together: "party work!"

After we returned to Addis, we were immediately tasked with the organization and running of the official newspaper of the Commission, SERTO ADER, with Shimelis as Editor-in-Chief, Tesfaye as First Deputy in charge of Ideology and myself as the Second Deputy for International Affairs, respectively. Soon other assistants joined us. We were not of course given the opportunity to choose our assistants. The Chairman interviewed them individually, in rare cases upon recommendation by Shimelis and simply sent them over to us.



The task of leading the Ideology department was left to Captain Fiqre Selassie Wogderess who, as I mentioned earlier, had completed his political training in Moscow. He had in the meantime read a lot on Marxism, deepened his knowledge of history. Fasika Sidelil, an economist of high calibre, was assigned to assist him. As it transpired in the years that followed, Fasika's great ambitions and best of intentions for the Country's sober economic transformation and development were routinely subverted by extremist elements around President Mengistu.

For all intents and purposes, COPWE had the structures of a political party and its membership was categorized into Executive Committee (Politburo) Central Committee, and simple membership. Shimelis and Tesfaye were elevated into the Central Committee. The decision to become member of the Commission or any of the organs in the new hierarchy was made solely by the Chairman. Members did not apply to join; they were simply drafted by the Chairman, perhaps after consultation with his close advisers.

Being drafted into the Secretariat of the Commission was considered a special favour and some of our colleagues who were not called to serve in the Secretariat at Arat Kilo could not hide their envy; little did they know that some of us were eager to be relieved of that burden soonest.

As the work of constituting the broader membership of the Commission for the Organization of the Workers Party of Ethiopia, COPWE, was completed after almost a year of

preparation, my third and youngest son, Ashenafi was born on 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1980. I named him Ashenafi (the winner) not to herald the birth of a Worker's Party, but to signify my survival.

On June 19, 1980, the Commission and the official weekly newspaper SERTOADER were launched simultaneously with great pomp and fanfare. Just like Al-Ahram of Nasser's Egypt, or Pravda of the USSR, Serto Ader became the authoritative organ and most wanted publication for all those that needed insight into government thinking.

Just like in those days of the power struggle within the Derg at the Grand Palace, after the launching of the Commission, the intrigues, cabals and other political games never ceased to manifest themselves. I was thus always longing to go back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and continue with my normal career there rather than rendering myself a target of innuendoes and unnecessary cabal at such a close proximity to the Head of State. I had had my share already and paid for it dearly.

In September 1980, the Chairman felt that all progressive parties in western and central Europe should know the work of the Commission. He therefore assigned a select group led by Major Berhanu Bayih, the head of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Secretariat to visit Greece, Italy, Portugal, East and West Germany as well to attend the Party Congresses in East Berlin, Sofia and Prague.

Our first stop over was in Athens, where Pan Hellenic Socialist Party, PASOK, was still in the opposition and our major partners were conducting a campaign for the elections that were to take place shortly afterwards. Melina Merkuri, a one time Hollywood film actress turned politician gave us a guided tour of Corinth and introduced us at a mass rally called by the mayor of the city of Nikia. We also met leaders of other smaller parties.

After Athens, before we proceeded to Lisbon, we travelled to Rome to meet with Mr. Pajetta of the Italian Communist Party and other activists. Before we left Rome, however, I was glad to meet, in secret, with my friend and former colleague Dr. Fitigu, who had sought asylum in Italy and was teaching at Rome University. He told me the circumstances of his exile and I felt I should tell Major Berhanu that Fitigu was indeed unfairly treated. Major Berhanu also sympathized with Fitigu and upon our return he advised Chairman Mengistu that persons like Dr. Fitigu, Ato Taye Retta and Ato Kifle Wodajo should be handed back their passports and be left to lead a normal life.

In Portugal we met the charismatic leader of the Communist Party Alvaro Cunhal and his Party collaborators who had just come out of the underground and gone public in the wake of the popular uprising only a few years earlier. During our private discussions, Mr. Cunhal, though a committed communist, told me that he always liked the late Emperor of Ethiopia and admired the courage of the Ethiopian people in defeating Italian Fascism. I was happy to

be Alvaro Cunhal's host in Ethiopia when he came for a return visit in 1981.

While on our way to Lisbon, we spent the night in Madrid and there, during one of our relaxed moments, I bold enough to ask Major Berhanu why our government was adamantly against improving relations with the US, given the fact that even the Russians have their best diplomats in place in Washington in the person of Anatoly Dobrynin, whereas, despite our long history of relations with the people of the United States, the Derg has not named an Ambassador since Ambassador Ayalew Madefro chose exile in the US in 1977. The post was vacant over a long period.

Major Berhanu listened quietly and did not respond then. The next morning, however, he abruptly broke our normal breakfast table conversation and rather angrily asked me as to who had sent me to ask the question I posed the pervious evening. I felt he was insinuating that it must be external elements that had encouraged me to pose such question to him.

Though surprised at this veiled suggestion I retorted that I believed no one Ethiopian was a better patriot than the other when it came to the interests of Ethiopia and what ever I suggested was in the long-term interests of our country. Tafesse Worq Wondimu, who was also in the delegation looked at me with surprise and sympathy, but Major Berhanu, did not raise the matter again; neither did he take any action against me on that score.

Throughout our tour, the Spanish and French languages I had learnt in jail came in handy. Our whole tour was taxing since Major Berhanu would narrate in exhaustive detail, his own historical analyses of the Ethiopian Revolution to every person we met every where, including to taxi drivers and to shop keepers. I had to interpret non-stop. Our mission was accomplished after three long weeks.

When in the summer of 1981, I was mandated to lead a group of public relations officers to Turin, Italy for the annual festival of UNITA, the Organ of the Italian Communist Party, I was joined by Martha Tadesse, serving as tourism promotions expert, Jacques Dubois, our Design Adviser, Woizero Kebedech Erdachew a professional exhibition decorator and, Worqu Tegegne a journalist who later on defected to Canada.

The occasion provided me with the opportunity to meet Fitigu once again. I congratulated him since he had already taken up by then a new and better-paying job with General Electric as sales representative for Africa.

In Turin, the stand of the Ethiopian Tourism Commission, jointly run with SERTOADER, was small but effective, especially since we served cups of aromatic Ethiopian coffee to visitors, for free. Eritrean dissidents residing in Turin also visited us. They seemed to be totally nostalgic the moment we played traditional Ethiopian music and when they hesitatingly approached us, we offered them coffee.

In the ensuing exchanges, we struck a quick friendship and they were soon integrated into our team helping us in distributing leaflets and in serving coffee to visitors. We discussed the war, of course, and we told each other that the war would have ended had leaders on both sides of the conflict sat down and reasoned together. By then, Naqfa and Algena in northern Eritrea were changing hands and the Ethiopian Army had also scored some minor successes elsewhere.

Not long after our return to Addis, Chairman Mengistu called a special meeting of the COPWE Secretariat and laid out a plan for a total war with Eritrean secessionists. He emphasized the need to use strong-arm tactics. He also spoke of the sophisticated weaponry the Soviets had provided Ethiopia and was confident that the war will soon be over.

I could not help but raise my hand and ask to speak and he relented. To his credit and my pleasure, he never referred to me as “Comrade” and always called me by my name only. First, I expressed my dismay at not having had the chance to see him one-on-one before that meeting, though he had expressed interest in being briefed upon my return from Turin. I did not dare to remind the Chairman that his own special assistant, Captain Mengistu Gemechu, had blocked my effort to see him.

I then narrated how we met our fellow citizens, Eritrean dissidents, and, at that small Ethiopian stand, we could

interact peacefully with them to the point that after the end of the exhibit, they, our Eritrean brothers and sisters, had organized lunch for us and we all shared wonderful moments. Our common culture and common heritage was our bond.

Then I went on to suggest that this kind of interaction could be enriched through better information dissemination, cultural activities, and sharing of economic benefits for all citizens. Other participants of the meeting echoed the same suggestion and the Chairman seemed quick to get our point. After some discussion on various other topics, he said he was setting up different committees dealing with culture, information, reconstruction, trade and economics in a broader approach to what he termed as the “Red Star Campaign”.

Shimelis Mazengia was charged with the task of coordinating all activities related to culture and information. Once in Asmara, I knew he would have easy access to the Chairman, and I requested Shimelis to lobby on my behalf to get me out of the newspaper editorial work and convince him to reassign me to some external relations area. Shimelis agreed.

At Asmara, Shimelis, faithful to the promise he gave me, raised my case and when the Chairman hesitated, Fisseha Geda, by now Commissioner for Tourism, was on hand to insist that he needed desperately a person that fitted my profile for his public relations work.

Thus, upon his return from the unfinished Red Star campaign, the Chairman wrote me a two-line letter, stating that with immediate effect, I had been posted to the Tourism Commission. I was very happy indeed and publicly displayed my pleasure, to the consternation of some “Comrades” who thought leaving Arat Kilo was like a demotion.

The aftermath of the Red Star campaign had claimed its own political casualties. Be'alu Girma, as Permanent Secretary of Information, was member of the Information and Culture Committee that was set up for the purposes of the Red Star Campaign.

Be'alu was in the best position to observe the behaviour of officials around the President and being a prolific writer, wrote an excellent novel, OROMAY that depicted and exposed the futility of the military aspect of the campaign and without naming them by their real names; he poignantly laid bare the true character of many of those officials around the President.

Be'alu's book soon gained wide popularity and was sold out in only a few days after publication. Be'alu's great literary work, although admired by the book-starved readership, clearly failed to impress the powers that be. On the contrary, it angered them and they schemed to get at him.

Be'alu disappeared suddenly and the story told was that one day in August 1983, while he was driving to work, security agents stopped him and took him away. His car was



left abandoned in a remote part of Addis and his whereabouts became a great mystery.

All of Be'alu's friends tried to get some information from State Security Chief Colonel Tesfaye Wolde Selassie and from other influential personalities that people thought would know. Nobody dared to ask the Chairman, of course. The Chief of State security swore he had no knowledge of the incident.

Even if he did, habitually Col. Tesfaye would not muster enough confidence to part with such information. Subsequently, in the wake of EPRDF's victory, so-called eyewitnesses tried to shed some light on Be'alu's disappearance, claiming they had seen him tortured.

That disappearance remained a mystery to the public including the very close collaborators of President Mengistu. Apparently, Be'alu perished in the same way as thousands of our other compatriots who were considered a threat to the regime.

Towards the end of the 80s, the Red Star campaign had faltered and the days of the Derg were numbered. Prime Minister Fiqre Selassie had fallen out of the President's favour and was forced into retirement. In the first years following the downfall of the Imperial Regime during the seventies, Fiqre Selassie was considered a radical revolutionary.

In later years, however, he was candid to admit that his compassion towards his fellow human beings intensified with his growing family responsibilities. Fiqre Selassie had begun to see the light at the end of the tunnel, unfortunately only during the last days of the regime.

Anders Wijkman, a former Swedish Red Cross Secretary General, serving since 2000 as member of the European Parliament and a great supporter of the Ethiopian Red Cross, knew Fiqre Selassie very well. When we met in Addis again in 2006, he revealed to me that while still Prime Minister, Fiqre Selassie had told him that he wanted to develop closer relations with Socialist International.

In the process, he was seeking the good offices of Prime Minister Olav Palme of Sweden to find a way, through the collective pressure of Socialist International, to avert the blind slide of Ethiopia into outmoded socialist path that even Gorbachev's Soviet Union was abandoning. He was seeking Wijkman's assistance in his effort to establish a channel of communication with the Swedes.

When we heard the tragic death of Olav Palme, Fiqre Selassie was visibly shattered and immediately arranged to attend the burial ceremony in Stockholm. Accompanied by Foreign Minister Goshu Wolde, his Personal Assistant Teshome Tesfaye, and myself, he had a long and very fruitful discussion with Foreign Minister Ingvar Carlsson who succeeded Olav Palme.

Despite, Fiqre Selassie's desire for new approach in the governance of pre-EPRDF Ethiopia, his early retirement and other events that unfolded subsequently did not permit him to control the damage that many thought President Mengistu's unquestioning adherence to "Democratic Centralism" had brought upon Ethiopia.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *Promoting Tourism*

I knew Commissioner Fisseha Geda when he was serving with Major Asrat Desta in the Information Committee of the Derg before he was assigned as Chief of State Protocol and then Commissioner for Tourism. He is a man of great heart, credited with having saved many innocent Ethiopians from the Derg's Red Terror campaign. The two years I spent with him at the Tourism Commission as his Promotions Adviser were perhaps among the most interesting and happiest years of my career.

Here, I found a person that could effectively use the talents of others never micro-managed them and in fact constantly pleaded with the Chairman to release Hotel and Tourism professionals and other intellectuals that were imprisoned without charge and let them help in the running of the Commission. The Chairman relented, and great Ethiopians such as Habte Selassie Tafesse, Yohannes Kifle and Ato Getaneh had already benefited from Fisseha's intercessions. If I may quote from Former US President Richard Nixon's interview with Larry King of the CNN that was aired in early nineties, "a true leader is one that surrounds himself with people that are smarter than he is". Fisseha Geda was indeed a leader.

With a highly talented team that consisted also of the respected and experienced journalist Mairegu Bezabeh, the

Commission produced publications and photographic as well as film material on Ethiopia by engaging seasoned writers like Graham Hancock, Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gebre Medhin, Anthropology Researcher Alberto Tessore, Travel Writers, Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith, as well as photographers and world-class film producers Mohammed Amin and Tafesse Jarra. Their works were well reviewed that they were reproduced several times over. Later on, towards the downfall of the regime, Fisseha was assigned as Ambassador to North Korea. It is from there that he immigrated to the US where began to lead a quiet life.

The two years I spent in the Tourism Commission were a major landmark in the history of the Derg. The Workers Party of Ethiopia was founded, and the tenth anniversary of the revolution in 1984 was celebrated with great pomp, despite the looming recurrence of famine in the provinces, especially in Wello. A new constitution was drafted, Soviet style all the way, and, ratified in referendum also held in Soviet style, with the decision already made beforehand by the Politburo of the Workers Party. That process was referred to as “organizational work”. Even the awarding of medals for distinguished services, except in a few notable cases of irrefutable gallantry at the war front and the recognition given to renowned professionals such as surgeons, educators, artists and writers was “organizational work”. However, Professors Asrat Woldeyes, Ede Marian Tsega, Mesfin Wolde Mariam, posthumously Yidneqachew Tesemma and a few others were deservedly recognized.

Towards the end of 1984, in my capacity as Senior Adviser for Tourism Promotion, I led a delegation to Las Vegas, to participate in the annual American Association of Travel and Tourism Agencies (AASTA). Million Wolde Mesqel, Martha Tadesse and I were confronted with insurmountable challenge since under socialist rule, Ethiopia was not marketable to foreign, especially the hard currency spending, western tourists. Then there was also the drought catastrophe in Wello again.

We tried to make the best out of our participation in the Las Vegas event, which was soon overshadowed by more news of the great famine of 1984 that had struck most parts of northern and central Ethiopia. While in Las Vegas, the entire delegation watched with shock the BBC screening of the famine that revisited Wello as narrated by the famous BBC Reporter Michael Burk. Just as in 1974, the people of Ethiopia were helpless and we all felt the terrible pain and abandonment of our people.

A day before the AASTA exhibit was over, I got a phone call from Fisseha Geda, who told me that the Chairman wished to see me immediately and that I should return to Addis as soon as possible. It took me three or four connections to reach Rome and when I called him from Rome, he said I could take it easy as the Chairman was now hosting the OAU Summit in Addis and would see me after a week or so. All the same I took the next available plane and reached Addis before the Summit was over.

Back in Addis, I went straight to Ghion Hotel, where the Chairman had taken residence along with other African leaders. He was visibly pleased to see that I had responded to his call and said that Fiqre Selassie would soon talk to me. They had apparently put me on a short list of three or four persons to be nominated Deputy Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation.

Berhane Deressa, my former colleague in the Foreign Ministry, and I had been suggested for the post following a discussion the President had with Ambassadors of the European Union. During that meeting, Ambassador Rossi of Italy, then chairing the European Union Group of Ambassadors, had advised the President on the need to deploy persuasive diplomats if Ethiopia were to succeed in mobilizing the required international humanitarian assistance to respond adequately to the famine that had revisited the country.

A few months earlier, on the orders of President Mengistu, Berhane had been relegated to running a government household goods and furniture enterprise. This was because though Berhane made a sound suggestion regarding strategies for the 19<sup>th</sup> summit of the OAU that Ethiopia was to host shortly, the President felt challenged. The impulsive action by the President had angered Foreign Minister Goshu Wolde and alienated other senior staff of the Ministry.

This time round, Berhane was immediately called to the President and ushered in with all the respect that he never

expected. Before he even agreed to take the job, his appointment as the new Deputy High Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation was made public.

I was given the equally demanding job of Secretary General of the Ethiopian Red Cross. No other appointment would have pleased me better. Diplomats were needed on all fronts to mobilize worldwide assistance to respond to the immediate need of the people and to save lives.

Captain Fiqre Selassie, then Patron of the Ethiopian Red Cross, called me into his office and laid out the tasks that I, as Secretary General, ought to undertake. He stressed the need to design strategies not only to respond to disasters when they occur, but also to strengthen preparedness and prevention. The idea impressed me.





## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *In The Service Of The Red Cross*

Working for the Red Cross was a dream come true. The alleviation of human suffering and hunger is the noblest of tasks. Protection and promotion of human rights was also a great challenge. In order to discharge my new responsibilities, I had to study first-hand what the administration of the National Society looked like and devise ways and means of improving it to respond adequately to growing humanitarian needs. I thus begged the indulgence of the Executive Board to give me some weeks before I could come up with a new structure and plan of action.

With the unfailing and dedicated support of Dr. Dawit Zawde, as well as that of a former college-mate Bekele Geleta, who I knew as a brilliant organizer, we set about transforming the entire structure. Dawit was a super communicator and endowed with the gift of networking with key partners in the Red Cross Movement. Bekele was a highly qualified administrator and planner and had executed the task of rebuilding destroyed railway tracks and bridges in record time in the wake of Somali aggression in the late seventies. When we presented the plan of work to the Executive Board, it was endorsed without difficulty.

Soon, we infused new blood into the management by bringing in Tsehay Feleqe, who had a proven track record as the innovator and administrator of the Children's Village,

Girma Shibeshi, a Price Waterhouse Chartered Accountant and Costantinos Berhe Tesfu, a flamboyant agronomist and management expert who was also victim of the so called Red Terror and had spent time in the notorious Addis Ababa Prison. We formed a cohesive and dedicated team in the running of the Red Cross.

Dr. Dawit had tasted the wrath of the Derg in 1977, when he was thrown into a military prison for a short while upon his return from a graduate medical school in London. Bekele was General Manager of the Ethio-Djibouti Rail Way Company when Derg agents snatched him on trumped up allegations and threw him into the Central Prison. Even while a prisoner he had helped establish the best high school in Ethiopia within the premises of the prison compound meant for the benefit of young prisoners. Costantinos was General Manager of the State Forestry Development Agency before he suffered the same fate as Bekele and the rest of us. Between us we had an accumulated experience that could efficiently run any big humanitarian organization in the country.

Before re-structuring, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society had only one million Birr, equivalent at that time to half a million USD in revolving funds. Immediately after the reform, Dawit and I, assisted by Bekele and Costantinos, started a worldwide fund-raising campaign and reached a total amount of well over one hundred million Dollars in cash and kind. The Ethiopian Red Cross thrived under Fiqre

Selassie's guidance, the chairmanship of Dr. Dawit Zawde, and the dedicated service of the entire staff.

The Executive Board members and Regional Chair Persons of the Red Cross were all persons of impeccable integrity that included Bank Governor and our Treasurer Tadesse Gebre Kidan, later on appointed Ambassador to Canada, Hailu Wolde Amanuel, Ambassador to the European Union, Assefa Yirgu, a veteran journalist, Abebe Engida Sew, Deputy Mayor of Addis Ababa, Dr. Zewdineh Yimtatu, Professor at Addis Ababa University, Dr. Mekonnen of the Police Hospital, Maitre Artist Afeworq Tekle And Dr Tibebe Yemane-Berhan. These humanitarian volunteers were instrumental in steering the growth and development of the Red Cross during my tenure as Secretary General.

As we embarked on disaster preparedness and prevention programs, Bekele and Costantinos did a superb job in preparing projects that convinced German, Scandinavian, Canadian, Japanese and other sister societies that worked in close coordination with the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (later on re-named Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies where Bekele was appointed Secretary General in 2008) as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross that chipped in even more to reinforce our efforts.

We thus mobilized several millions more Dollars for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness projects, unparalleled in the history of any National Red Cross Society in Africa. We could muster enough resources to sign project agreements

with other implementing agencies, and even with Ethiopian government ministries. The Red Cross Development Program was exemplary in every way.

The international community and, indeed, the people of Ethiopia were looking for some credible public institution to respond to the worsening humanitarian needs and Ethiopian Red Cross Society of the early 80s, as the largest Non Governmental Humanitarian Organization in sub-Saharan Africa, provided one. Local and international media reported on our activities widely. We too, effectively used them in the promotion of the humanitarian cause and in our appeals for more assistance.

In the disaster stricken province of Wello, through the tireless efforts of the unsung heroes like Mehari Measho, then deputy Administrator of Wello and his dedicated staff, the Red Cross, transformed Bati, what was then the death camp of thousands of draught victims, into a vegetable garden. Girma Neway, who at the time was Representative of the Workers Party of Ethiopia in Wello, was highly supportive.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *Meeting Fidel Castro And Other Leaders*

While I was working for the Red Cross, I was often times called to serve also as interpreter for a number of high-level good-will delegations that were addressing rallies in foreign countries and at mass gatherings in Addis Ababa. I accompanied Prime Minister Fiqre Selassie, Deputy Prime Minister Fisseha Desta, Colonel Addis Tedla, Colonel Berhanu Bayih and Captain Legesse Asfaw in their different missions.

For me, such occasions provided an opportunity to observe from a closer proximity and assess first-hand the mindset of not only the individual Derg members that I accompanied, but also that of Fidel Castro, Kim IL Sung, and Erich Honeker, Gustav Husak, Theodore Zhuvkov, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Sam Njoma, Yasser Arafat, Oliver Tambo and an assortment of other leaders.

Though there may be many in the western world who do not agree entirely with the way Fidel Castro ran his island nation, the Cuban leader was admired by many others, especially in the Third World, for having been able to stand up resolutely and survive all these years in the face of the might of and seemingly unending controversies with his big neighbour, the United States of America. I always wanted to meet that famous person and my opportunity came in the

spring of 1986 when I was assigned as an interpreter to join a delegation to Havana.

We visited the length and breadth of the beautiful island and saw thousands of young Ethiopians who were given educational opportunities by the government of Cuba. Finally we also met Fidel Castro, the leader that had captured the imagination of so many revolutionaries the world over.

Fidel Castro met us in his modest office just across the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana and started the conversation with questions about "Comrade Mengistu", how he was doing, his health, etc. Throughout the conversation he was looking with curiosity at the pitch-dark blue khaki uniforms of his Ethiopian guests.

After we conveyed our President's fraternal greetings and warm sentiments the discussion that followed was mainly briefing him on current developments. There was, as was usually the case on such occasions, "common assessment and complete similarity of views".

As we met the Cuban leader, the entire delegation except for me, were all dressed for the occasion. By this time it was obligatory in Ethiopia, as commanded by President Mengistu, that all officials should wear blue Korean style tailored khaki uniforms. The colour was so obnoxious that it was offensive to the onlooker, but President Mengistu apparently rejoiced in seeing every one, him included, dressed as simple factory workers. I was spared of that honor because I insisted, right

from the outset, that I was Red Cross official and did not feel obliged to wear the uniform. Instead I chose a simple Cuban tailored casual outfit.

As we left his office, Castro turned to me and wondered as to why the “comrades” were wearing a blue Korean type uniform. Though I had spoken English all the time, seeing that I wore a Cuban tailored shirt, he asked if I were Cuban. I politely responded in his native Spanish that I was Ethiopian. He then hugged me and said he wished he could retain me in Havana. One of our members tried in vain to explain to the Cuban leader that Ethiopian officials were wearing those uniforms as a mark of solidarity with the working class. Fidel Castro was not impressed at all.

When I met President Fidel Castro again some sixteen years later in 2001 as an Emissary of Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, it was while was attending the 105<sup>th</sup> Inter-parliamentary Union’s annual gathering in Havana. I could still read in his face his resoluteness and determination to stick to his socialist beliefs; despite the downfall years ago of the system that once bankrolled him.

What I noticed during my trips to Cuba is that Cuban Communism differed from that of Eastern Europe in being the product of a national revolution, not of foreign conquest. Fidel Castro was inspired first and foremost by his determination to struggle for social justice and do away with any form of corrupt dictatorship. Cuba’s sad history of



Spanish colonial rule survived far longer in the island than in the rest of Latin America. Spanish colonialism was replaced by years of repressive rule of the likes of the notorious dictator Batista, a US ally.

Fidel Castro was the great survivor of world politics. When he marched into Havana in January 1959 at the head of his revolutionary comrades, I was in high school at Debre-Zeit. At that time, Emperor Haile Selassie, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Dwight Eisenhower, Harold Macmillan and Nikita Khrushchev were all in power. Castro has outlasted ten American presidents and an equal number of Soviet leaders, defied a US embargo for over forty years and continued to enjoy the support and respect of the Third World.

After their hard-won victory, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and their fellow revolutionaries used their power not to amass personal wealth, but to give Cubans world-class health and education services. Those achievements were genuine. They also put Cuba firmly on the map when they boldly stood by oppressed nations of the world, such as in Angola and Ethiopia.

Castro loved our country and Cuban soldiers came to Ethiopia's rescue in 1978 and heroically fought alongside the Ethiopian Army to decisively repulse the expansionist aggression unleashed by Said Barre of Somalia. Cuba has trained thousands of young Ethiopian Doctors, Engineers, Agronomists and Economists. Castro had even taken in, nearly five thousand young children at a go. Most of them

orphaned by the Ethio-Somalia war, they brought up and educated at schools in the Island of Youth in Cuba.

Fidel Castro's genuine solidarity with the people of Ethiopia could never be underestimated. Thus, Ethiopia continued to maintain friendly relations with Cuba and the commemoration in 2007 by the EPRDF-led government of a monument in Addis Ababa was a fitting recognition of and tribute to the eternal bonds of the Cuban and Ethiopian peoples. Fidel Castro retired in 2008 after a long illness, leaving the Cuban parliament to elect his brother Raul as the next president. Raul Castro immediately relaxed the socio-economic regime that his elder brother has put in place and run for several decades.

Meeting Kim IL Sung in Pyongyang in 1986 was an interesting experience. Kim was a story unto himself. His docile subjects worshiped him like a god. They seemed intoxicated by his very sight. His admiration for President Mengistu was also enormous to the extent that Mengistu would get any thing he asked of him. He was the major supplier for Ethiopia's newly established armaments factories. In retrospect, I believed this must have been the kiss of death for President Mengistu's regime, as Ethiopia's arms build up was not at all favourably seen by western powers.

During our visit, I noticed that Old Kim behaved like an ancient feudal king. While he was treating us for a sumptuous lunch in his otherwise not so agriculturally endowed country,

he was narrating his exploits during the Korea-Japan war and apparently wanted to tell us that he was a young man then. He turned to one of his elderly aids and asked how old he, Kim IL Sung, was when he beat “those Japanese”.

The elderly man, a very high-level politburo member, jumped from his seat and said: “Comrade, you were less than thirty.” Kim nodded approvingly and repeated to us that he was indeed less than thirty. I could not help laughing within myself. The “Great Leader” had to have some one remind him of his own age and time of his own activities. In contrast, Emperor Haile Selassie had sharp memory even at an advanced age. Kim’s behaviour, however, reflected more of an imperial demeanour than that which the Ethiopian Emperor used to display while meeting foreign guests.

Our other visits to western capitals such as London, Geneva and Rome were aimed at meeting leaders of so called progressive parties and briefing Ethiopians residing in those countries on the latest “revolutionary” developments at home. In this exercise, during our visit to Europe, Ambassador Kassa Kebede, then Permanent Representative in Geneva was particularly active. Kassa, who had studied in Israel and spoke fluent Hebrew, had forged close relations with Tel Aviv for President Mengistu and facilitated the emigration of thousands of FALASHAS, Ethiopian Jews, to Israel. As a reward from his Israeli friends, during the final hours of the Derg in 1990, Kassa was spirited out of Addis camouflaged as a sick FALASHA being evacuated for immediate medical treatment. Kassa Kebede was a master strategist and an

experienced lobbyist. He finally settled in the United States to work for a think tank.

During my years as Secretary General of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, we used every opportunity to strengthen closer relations with the Swedish and German Cross Societies. Prince Botho von Witgenstein of the German Red Cross, with whom Dr. Dawit, Bekele Geleta, Costantinos and myself had cultivated a close relationship, our colleague and very close friend Anders Wijkman of the Swedish Red Cross, as well as my friend and colleague the German Secretary General Herman Schmitz-Wenzel, made it possible for our Society to develop rapidly. They also helped in mobilizing the support of other sister societies.

Ethiopian Red Cross had by now acquired a fleet of over four hundred trucks and other vehicles, a state of the art nation-wide radio communications network and a first rate training centre. Our food distribution networks knew no boundaries and we could reach victims in rebel held areas with no major difficulty, notwithstanding the minders assigned by the State Security Ministry keen to monitor our activities. We strongly believed that humanitarian assistance should not be denied to any Ethiopian in distress, be they in government held or rebel held areas. By the time I was appointed Minister Counsellor to our Embassy in Berlin and Bekele Geleta took over as Secretary General, the Society was functioning on a big surplus budget.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *Return To Diplomacy*

By 1986, though some six years had elapsed since I left the Derg's prison, the prison never really left me. I lived in constant fear. This fear left me entirely only after left Addis Ababa on my diplomatic assignment. Until the regime changed, any person in the country, even if he or she was put in a respectable position and worked closely with the leadership, could end up in prison any day because of trumped up charges.

The one painful moment I had to absorb was a day in February 1986, when, as I was serving in the Red Cross, my friend and Colleague Ambassador Berhanu Dinka, was picked up by the notorious State Security agents and led to the Central Investigation and Prison Centre. I was with him the previous evening before heading for a field trip to Wello to organize distribution of relief assistance.

Upon hearing the news of Berhanu's arrest the entire Red Cross team watching the evening TV program in our Dessie hotel were all dumbfounded and could not imagine how an innocent person like Berhanu, whom everybody liked and admired for his first rate performance as a diplomat, could be thrown into jail without charge. I was outraged and immediately felt like fleeing the country before the same thing could happen to me again.

Apparently, besides some minor administrative and procedural oversight that his adversaries used to frame him with, Berhanu was victim of a palace intrigue that was going on against the Relief and Rehabilitation Chief Major Dawit Wolde Ghiorgis, who, in the course of his duties was closely coordinating his work with Berhanu, the then Permanent Representative in New York.

Thus, when Berhanu came to Addis for the usual consultations, the President called him into his office, talked to him in what seemed a sober encounter. Nothing of “the administrative lapse” was mentioned to him. As Berhanu left the office of the President, the order had already been given for his arrest. That unpredictable action shocked all of us. Berhanu was to spend well over four bitter years in jail and like the rest of us that tasted prison life before him, he too was never given the opportunity to see a lawyer or plead his case before a court. His release came after ceaseless intercession with the President, largely by Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka (no family relationship) and Fasika Sidelil.

As a result of a series of events that took place in the summer of 1986, following the defection to the US of Major Dawit Wolde Ghiorgis, who had enough of the intrigue around President Mengistu, the post of the Commissioner was left vacant. Later on, only a few months after Dawit’s departure, his Deputy, Berhane Deressa who, like his senior colleague was also disaffected, chose to stay in the US following his last mission to the UN headquarters in New York. President Mengistu had to fill both posts with his

"trusted comrades". So, he appointed Major Berhanu Jembere as Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner and Lt. Tibebe Shifferaw as Deputy.

This situation left the Berlin diplomatic post vacant. The President followed the suggestion of his Foreign Policy Adviser Dr. Ashagre Yiglettu and decided that it would be advantageous to send Commander Lemma Gutema and me as a team to the GDR. Ethio-GDR cooperation was at its peak and had to be maintained at the very high level. Fiqre Selassie, although in not so good terms at the time with Foreign Minister Goshu Wolde, kindly agreed to my new posting as Minister Counsellor in Berlin. My return to active diplomacy was a Godsend.

Foreign Minister Goshu Wolde, a fiery lawyer had previously served as Military Prosecutor and Minister of education. His leadership in the nation-wide campaign to try and reduce the illiteracy level in the country from some ninety five percent to barely thirty five percent in a short time has been exemplary. Before he signed my mission order, he was preparing to go to the UN General Assembly in New York and when I met him, he seemed rather distraught.

Goshu, a deeply religious person, and his wife, the late Dr. Chaltu had been good friends. On his last day in Addis, he avoided the chauffer driven government vehicle and instead asked me to give him a ride to the Nationalities Institute that was housed near Black Lion Hospital, some four Kilometres away from the Foreign Ministry.



In the privacy of my car, I asked Goshu why he looked depressed. He then confided to me his disgust with the present leadership in the country. After he arrived in New York, indeed, he sought asylum in the US and stayed there.

Before I left to take up my new post in Berlin, the Red Cross colleagues threw a farewell party that is still fresh in my mind. The luncheon reception organized by Dr. Dawit, Bekele Geleta, Tsehay Feleqe and the rest of the staff was generous. Many dignitaries, including our venerable Red Cross Branch Chairman in Eritrea, Girma Wolde Ghiorgis were in attendance. Girma, an articulate career civil servant and former President of Parliament during the days of the Emperor, was later on to serve as a two-term President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in the new regime.

The souvenir presented to me was a golden ring with a red cross enamelled in the middle. Woineshet also got a necklace with the same design. Some Marxist zealots were not happy to see it on my finger, obviously mistaking it for the cross of Christ, which I would have carried with pleasure in any case.

Woineshet and I continue to treasure dearly those gifts of expression of friendship, recognition of achievement and respect from our colleagues in the Ethiopian Red Cross. I remain humbled by the knowledge that the big farewell party that was thrown in our honor was the first and the last of its kind in the history of the National Society.

Meanwhile, my friend Tesfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot, who by this time was elevated to the position of Editor-in-Chief of SERTOADER, was appointed Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations and he too was preparing to take up his new assignment.

Tesfaye's appointment to the highly visible and much coveted New York assignment came as complete surprise to him and to some of the senior personalities around the President, particularly to the not so few that had yearned to be chosen for that position.

In the summer of 1986, just as Michael Gorbachev's PERESTROIKA (Change or Re-thinking) was beginning to make its dent on the Communist Party and indeed on people in all walks of life in the USSR, Tesfaye and I left Addis together with our families to our respective posts in New York and Berlin.

When my family and I arrived in Berlin, Capital of what was then the German Democratic Republic, GDR, the ruling Socialist Unity Party was in the midst of discussing the impact of PERESTROIKA. In the face of the reality of a changing world, the Party had taken a stand, though not so publicly articulated, that Gorbachev's idea was heresy and denial of true communism. Thus, to prevent Gorbachev's book from reaching the wider public, the Socialist Unity Party had bought all copies that were available in the German edition and stashed them.

On my part, I was satisfied to get hold of the English version in West Berlin and after reading it thoroughly, like most of my contemporaries, I concluded that the days of communism were numbered. I bought several copies and sent them to Addis to those I knew were hardliners as well as to those who were close friends to the President.

When I called some of them later on to find out their reaction, they described Gorbachev's visionary thoughts as betrayal of communism. They were obviously reflecting the President's thoughts, as if by sheer obstinacy Ethiopia could escape the "wind of change". To his credit, Commander Lemma Gutema, the Ambassador, who was then considered a staunch Mengistu Loyalist, was realistic enough to conclude that the world including Ethiopia was indeed going to change.

In my new posting, following up on day-to-day diplomatic activities was a daunting task. Even then, I now found enough time to concentrate also on bringing up my three sons, trying to mould them to be good citizens imbued with love of country and people.

Since the East Germans needed to assert themselves as an independent state, they allowed lots of amenities to the diplomatic corps, hoping, naively perhaps, that this would give them the competitive edge over their Federal German adversaries. They provided us, the diplomatic community, with a lavish club with the best of sports and other entertainment facilities. Diplomatic life in Berlin was thus very interesting and at times amusing.

Ethiopia's interest in the GDR concentrated mainly in the fields of education, medical assistance, industrial and commercial cooperation. Cooperation between the two countries in the areas of security was conducted directly between President Mengistu and Erich Honeker's politburo.

In such activities as military cooperation that President Mengistu considered solely his own domain, even Ambassador Lemma Gutema was not involved. The Ambassador and I would be invited to the annual hunting picnic by the Head of State, attend the usual diplomatic functions and follow up on routine state to state relations.

Despite all the generosity of our East German hosts, almost all diplomats did our shopping in West Berlin. Some of us even chose to send our children to schools in West Berlin. We did not mind at all going through the daily scrutiny by the East German Guard at Checkpoint Charley or at the border crossing on Bornholmer Strasse in Pankow, adjacent to the French Sector, always being photographed in the process, day in and day out.

Suspicious that we might be smuggling their citizens into the West, our East German hosts would some times even shadow our movements following us into West Berlin through their resident agents there. We were always aware that our cars with their East German diplomatic plates were easy targets also for West Berlin Police and US Army

intelligence surveillance. The cat and mouse game was fun, though not always amusing.

The contrast between East and West Berlin was stark. Whenever we entered into East Berlin at the end of each day, even my little son Henok would always comment that he was finally happy to be in East Berlin because it was so quiet and peaceful. He was obviously comparing it to the hustle and bustle of West Berlin.

What my son did not perhaps know then, I believe, was that free movement of a free society has indeed its own noise, unnoticed by citizens who took that noise for granted. On the other hand, enforced discipline of a controlled society has its own peace, born out of fear and total submission. That peace, however, was an illusion. Rebellion was already around the corner, waiting to erupt at any moment.

Whenever I had more time for a visit to West Berlin, I frequented driving past the Rathaus Schoeneberg, the municipal building near the Technical University. There, I always stopped to look at the balcony of the building from where in 1961 President John F. Kennedy spoke to thousands of West Berlin citizens and delivered his famous “*Ich bin ein Berliner*” speech. Indeed, as Kennedy stated, if any one had any doubt about the difference between freedom and subjugation, one needed to go to Berlin.

My family and I were lucky to have been witness to what could perhaps be described as the greatest event of the

eighties, the downfall of a system that had divided and suppressed an industrious nation for nearly half a century. My sons and I were happy to join the Berlin crowds and in solidarity with them and chip off souvenirs from the concrete wall when through popular uprising it was finally dismantled on 03 October 1989.

Earlier, in the month of May of the same year, President Mengistu was invited for an official visit to East Berlin. We made all the necessary preparations to ensure the success of the visit and the President who, accompanied by his attractive wife Wubanchi, Colonel Berhanu Bayih the Foreign Minister, Tesfaye Dinka then Deputy Prime Minister and other dignitaries arrived in Berlin. Mr. and Mrs. Honecker with the entire Politburo lined up and received them warmly.

As we drove out of Schoenefeld International Airport, General Tamene Dillnensaw, our Military Attaché based in Moscow and I, driving in the same Limousine, heard over the car radio a BBC newscast in which a coup attempt against President Mengistu was reported. Addis Ababa was in turmoil.

No sooner had the President who was being escorted by his counterpart arrived at the State Guest House in Pankow than Ambassador Lemma Gutema brought the breaking news to him. The President immediately asked for a point-to-point radiotelephone communication. As the central telephones were suspended in Addis, the Embassy Security Officer, Captain Belay Gebre Tsadiq and I managed to get a special

line to Fiqre Selassie Wogderess who was still Prime Minister.

Fiqre Selassie was in the process of describing the situation over the phone when the President interrupted him to confirm his own suspicion and listed several names that he thought were involved in the coup attempt. Fiqre Selassie confirmed all of them except one. President Mengistu was totally surprised that General Seyoum, his Military Intelligence Chief whom he had always suspected as harbouring ambitions had not joined the rebels. He was dead right regarding the others. Apparently the President had advance intelligence from his loyal Trojan horse within the rebel group, before he left Addis Ababa.

As it was revealed later, State Security Chief Colonel Tesfaye was apparently collaborating all along with the rebel officers until the last moment, keeping the President up-to-date on every move by the plotters. They included the Minister of Industry and former Air Force Commander General Fanta Belay, his successor General Amaha, Chief of Staff General Merid Negussie, Ground Force Commander General Hailu Gebre Michael and several other high ranking officers.

Colonel Tesfaye and Captain Mengistu Gemetchu, Special Assistant to the President, who had not joined the visiting party in Berlin mobilized the Special Forces at the Palace and crushed the coup with ease. Once darkness fell, Air Force Mig fighter planes could not fly. It was bad planning on the

part of those Generals and President Mengistu once again displayed his characteristic resoluteness when it came to consolidating his power.

The plotters were tried by a hastily chosen military tribunal that simply rubber-stamped President Mengistu's decision to find them guilty of treason. The fate of the rebel generals was then sealed at a closed meeting of staunch Mengistu Loyalists. Ambassador Fisseha Geda, a long time friend of the rebel Generals and confidant of the President, rushed to Addis from Pyongyang to advise the President to pardon the coup plotters and start a process of national reconciliation and dialogue in earnest. President Mengistu could not be swayed.

Generals Merid Negussie and Amaha did not give President Mengistu the satisfaction of ordering their execution. They had already committed suicide before they could be apprehended. General Fanta and most of the other rebel generals were soon apprehended. Fanta was allegedly killed in a scuffle with the prison Guard despite Mengistu's reportedly keen desire to talk to him before the trial.





## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *Witnessing The End Of The German Democratic Republic*

Meanwhile in Berlin, it was becoming clearer every day that the GDR communist regime was getting weaker and weaker as the ruling party started to crack from within. The people took notice and the exodus to the West increased in greater and greater proportions. Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, that were already wrenching their freedom from Soviet paws, opened their western frontiers, making it easy for GDR citizens to use those passages to flee to their kith and kin in West Germany.

The final blow to the Socialist Unity Party came when one hundred and thirty five East Germans simply walked into the office of the West German Representative in East Berlin and barricaded themselves there. My West German colleague, Herr Von Studniz, invited me to witness for my self what was going on. The East Germans tried to negotiate discretely an easy solution to the diplomatic incident. However, that attempt was futile, since the West German tabloid BILDZEITUNG had already broken the story.

Later on, a former GDR ambassador to Ethiopia, Hans Jagenaw then serving in the Foreign Ministry, made a realistic assessment of the situation when he told me: “whatever the motive of the people inside the Federal German Representative’s Office in East Berlin, it is over with

the German Socialist Unity Party. We have lost control of the country!” he said.

After the series of demonstrations by masses of disgruntled GDR citizens, as well as the night vigils in Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig and other major population centres, the notorious state security, STASI, could not cope with the mounting protests.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was the culmination of several years of effort by western powers at challenging the Soviet system that had repressed eastern and central Europe since the defeat of German Nazism. At a rally close to the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin in 1987, President Ronald Regan had even called on General Secretary Gorbachev to “tear down this wall”.

The ceaseless sessions of the four power talks, which brought together the World War II allies, US, UK, France and Russia, with representatives of the two Germanys in attendance, had finally borne fruit. While the Soviet system was aging just like the leaders that tried to perpetuate it through brute force, capitalism in the west seemed to guarantee liberties, withstand all the romantic student uprisings of the mid-sixties and thrive on successes of post-war reconstruction.

Despite Erich Honeker’s prediction only a year before in Vienna that the Berlin wall would stand for the next one hundred years, it took only the change of heart of one Soviet

leader, Michael Gorbachev, to put an end to Honeker's hard-line communist dream.

Indeed, until November 9, 1989 it seemed that the Wall built in 1961 and served as death trap for so many GDR citizens seeking freedom, was not about to be removed. The authorities had even strengthened and re-mined the death-strip that ran along it.

Along the entire border with West Germany, the East Germans had installed more of the automatic shooting-devices, which killed several would-be escapers. Many East German soldiers that were posted on guard duty on the border had voted with their feet and crossed the frontier. Others were reluctant to shoot fellow citizens trying to get out. The automatically triggered machines, however, would not hesitate. The wall symbolized the cruelty of the system for much too long.

In early November, Erich Honeker was deposed by his own Politburo and Egon Krenz was elevated to the Chairmanship of the ruling party. Thus, Honecker, who a week before had presided over the pompous 40th anniversary celebrations of the East German State, was left to the mercy of his own people.

In the re-structured Politburo, a few new faces were added and that did not satisfy the restless population. As Krenz was one among equals, I noticed during meeting him at the annual New Year's reception that he could not command respect and

consolidate the kind of power that Honeker once wielded. Krenz struggled to stay on for half a year.

While all this was going on, Erich Honeker had sought refuge at the home of Catholic priests since none of his erstwhile communist comrades would have anything to do with him. Meanwhile, in the corridors of power in East Berlin, the cracks were widening and the Party was thrown into disarray and rendered leaderless.

The 9th of November 1989 was a Thursday; and at a meeting of the Politburo of the ruling party, GDR authorities had agreed to open the wall. This decision must have been made spontaneously in response to the growing protests in Leipzig, Dresden and many other cities in the GDR.

The border posts were not alerted, neither was the decision communicated down the chain of command to the security organs when Guenther Schakowsky, former Editor-in-Chief of the Central Organ Neues Deutschland, and later on member of the Politburo in charge of the Capital, called a press conference to tell the world that as of that moment, the wall was totally irrelevant.

Schakowsky's hurried announcement emboldened GDR citizens to simply cross over *en masse* to West Berlin. At the same time, West Berliners began demolishing the wall. The situation was beyond the control of the GDR regime.

I was listening to Schabowski's statement over the radio while bringing my children from school in West Berlin and as I reached the border crossing at Bornholmer Strasse, I saw hundreds of young men arguing with the Guard to let them through since it had just been announced that the wall was no more relevant. The bewildered Guard packed their belongings and left their posts. The crowd that had now increased significantly crossed through the open gates on the border.

At all major checkpoints, it was a sight to see. Young and old women and men, youth and little children were running with joy in the direction of West Berlin free at last, to see the part of their country that had long been denied them. I could not help my emotions and felt very happy for them. Soon the crowds marching to West Berlin were increasing by the hundreds of thousands.

With their habitual efficiency, West Germans had instantly mobilized buses and other means of transportation making them available to their lost and found brothers and sisters. Later in the evening, my family and I joined the unending wave of human beings to march into West Berlin. That was our way of expressing solidarity with a happy people.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *Times Of Transition*

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the German Socialist Unity Party, GDR citizens of all social strata chose their representatives for a roundtable conference and these in turn chose a new coalition government under a lay Catholic preacher, Heinz Demezier. Ms. Bergman-Pohl, another non-communist, was named titular Head of State.

Back in Addis Ababa, the attempted Coup of May 1989 had provided President Mengistu with opportunity to reorganize the Council of State and bring in new faces, including Ambassador Lemma Gutema who now became Deputy Chairman of the Council, literally Vice-President.

A few months later, the President was advised to elevate senior diplomats to ambassadorial level. Thus, one month after the recall of Ambassador Lemma Gutema, President Mengistu appointed Dr. Feleqe, Assefa Wolde, Tibebe Bekele, Tadesse Gebre Kidan, Konjit Sene Giorgis and me as ambassadors assigning us to Rome, Nairobi, Bonn, Ottawa, Geneva and Berlin respectively. Our fresh start was made easier, thanks to the support provided to us by then newly appointed Vice Minister, Fisseha Yimer. Thus, my finest moment came when, after the audience with the President, I walked back in to the Foreign Ministry as an Ambassador through those same doors I had come out as his prisoner twelve years before.



Our Trade and Economy Counsellor Yilma Kassaye, an astute diplomat, was appointed to head the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. In the process, some of the finest and ablest civil servants, the Minister of Urban Planning, Tesfaye Maru, the Minister of Agriculture, Tekola Dejene and other middle level officials that had managed to disengage themselves from the immediate vicinity of the President took up international posts.

By that time the war in the north was intensifying and the economy was literally in shambles. Even then, salaries were paid in time and essential services were running normally. Though he believed with blind faith that he could win the war only through military might, the successively humiliating defeat suffered by the army forced President Mengistu to reluctantly agree to send a negotiating team to Atlanta to sit with the EPLF under former US President Carter's auspices and to Rome with TPLF/EPRDF facilitated by the Italian foreign ministry.

In April 1990 while I was sitting in his office to brief him on the latest developments regarding the downfall of the Erich Honecker regime in GDR, President Mengistu received a call from the leader of the Ethiopian negotiating team in Nairobi, Dr. Ashagre. The team had gone to the Kenyan capital as a follow up on the Atlanta talks held earlier in the year. Dr. Ashagre told him that Isaias Afeworqi's team had rejected all proposals forwarded from the government side.

The president suddenly got nervous, apologized that we had to cut short the briefing session and went hurriedly into consultation with his security chief. For me it was then clear that the President's stubbornness that was matched by equally stubborn disposition of the rebel leader would not take the negotiations any where and that the final result would be decided by the better fighter.

After I got back to Berlin, I presented my credentials to the Interim Head of State, Ms. Bergman-Pohl. The new rulers in East Berlin were only caretakers until the re-unification of Germany was officially presided over by Chancellor Kohl at a moving ceremony in front of the Reichstag in West Berlin in night of October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990.

Just before the inevitable total re-unification of Germany, I was appointed Ambassador to the Czech and Slovak Republics while also accredited to Hungary. I left Berlin after having made arrangements with my counterpart in Bonn, Ambassador Tibebu Bekele, to take over all assets of the Berlin Embassy, as these would be needed when the entire Bonn Embassy moved to Berlin. Tibebu, a dear friend and colleague since our college days, was close to my family and he kindly adopted my son Henok to continue in the French Lyceum in Bonn until arrangements were made for him to follow me to Prague.

When I arrived in Prague on October 5th, 1990, and in Budapest in the following month, the Czechs and the Hungarians did not keep me long before I could present my

credentials to Presidents Vaclav Havel and Arpad Gonz respectively. In fact Czech Foreign Minister Dienstbier received me on the day of my arrival in Prague and President Vaclav Havel received me at Prague Castle the next day.

I found my new assignment in the two former Soviet satellite states very interesting. Besides looking after Ethiopia's vital trade and cultural interests, interaction with Czechoslovak and Hungarian leaders was a useful learning experience as both countries were undergoing periods of democratic transition.

President Havel of Czechoslovakia who, as dramatist and a man of letters, had gained fame and respect in the Charter Seventy Seven Movement, and his counterpart in Budapest, President Arpad Gonz was also a dramatist. I found both Presidents as warm and humane. The peoples of the two countries indeed deserved such compassionate leaders after years of totalitarian oppression.

As Ethiopia had several hundred students studying in each of the countries and did conduct significant trade relations, the work demanded full attention. I loved my new assignment and went about visiting the various institutions in both countries making friends and networking everywhere for closer collaboration. In Prague itself, several active and former leaders were frequenting visits to the Court of Vaclav Havel.

We thus had the pleasure of hosting receptions in honor of participants in the Interaction Group meetings for Henry Kissinger, Helmut Schmidt, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, Olusegun Obasanjo, Robert McNamara, Pierre Eliot Trudeau, Jim Callaghan and other luminaries.

I have always admired Dr. Henry Kissinger for his sterling performance as a diplomat and now as an outstanding historian. During my days as a young journalist, I was fascinated by his role in ending the Vietnam War and in facilitating the normalization of relations between the US and China through the avenues of secret, and what was sometimes referred to as “ping pong diplomacy”. In the many years of my diplomatic career that followed, Dr. Kissinger’s works have guided and reinforced me.

As he was to admit during a BBC interview in January 2008, like many observers of latter day political developments, Kissinger too had never thought that his efforts in engaging China in the early sixties would have resulted in helping transform China from a classical communist state to a fully-fledged industrial state that thrived on capitalism. Our short but fruitful meeting in Prague reinforced my admiration of Dr. Kissinger.

In 1990, immediately upon arrival in Prague, during my interaction with the small diplomatic community in Prague, I had cultivated close relations with the Nigerian Ambassador, Yusuf Beita, Kuwait’s Ambassador Mussa and US

Ambassador, Shirley Temple Black. The first Gulf war was raging then.

All diplomats, with the exception of some pro-Iraq Arab representatives, stood by our Kuwaiti colleague Mussa, who for some time had lost total communication with his home country, his government and people when Saddam Hussein occupied the tiny oil rich state.

Shirley Temple Black, a former child actress and Hollywood film star, has always remained a compassionate human being, also in the world of diplomacy. Before coming to Prague, Shirley had her first assignment in Ghana and later on served in various capacities at the State Department. She was a genuine admirer of Ethiopian culture and was well acquainted with our history. We struck close friendship.

While Ambassador Tesfaye Tadesse was presiding over the Security Council in New York during the critical months of the Gulf War, I developed closer working relations with Ambassador Shirley Temple Black and other representatives in Prague of the Coalition countries. We conducted frequent consultations and shared useful information and analyses that we in turn transmitted to our respective capitals.

Ethiopia was now totally committed to supporting the US-led intervention in Kuwait. Needless to say that this action by the Ethiopian government now led by the new Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka was not enough to soften the US Administration towards President Mengistu.

President George Bush Senior also made a series of visits at the time to Europe to galvanize further support for the war effort. The Czechs were, after all, best placed to handle anti-personnel mines and explosives for the Coalition as they had supplied Saddam with explosive ordinance before the Iraqi dictator finally decided to devour Kuwait.

President Bush Senior had thus come to Prague to thank President Havel and the People of Czechoslovakia for their support. We all availed ourselves of the opportunity to shake hands and exchange good words with the President at a grand reception hosted in the splendid hall of the Prague Castle.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *The Fall Of Mengistu*

Meanwhile in Ethiopia, the forces of EPRDF were advancing on Addis Ababa and almost all parts of Northern Ethiopia except for Asmara where the Second Army was concentrated, were all in rebel hands. Captain Legesse Asfaw was appointed President Mengistu's Representative in Tigray when every front seemed to have been lost. In desperation, and, most certainly upon instruction from his boss, allegedly after having ordered the gruesome bombing of innocent civilians at Hawzien, he pulled out the entire army from the Meqelle just before the TPLF marched victoriously into the Tigrean capital. In the new Millennium, Legesse was being tried for mass murder.

After the fall of Shire Enda Selassie in 1989, and the subsequent pull out of the Ethiopian Army from Meqelle, neither Legesse, nor the docile generals assigned to serve at his pleasure were able to undo what military strategists considered was glaring tactical error. President Mengistu was beleaguered on all fronts.

Consequently, President Mengistu sent off his erstwhile loyal assistants, Colonel Fisseha Desta, the Vice President of the State Council and Captain Legesse Asfaw into retirement and simply made some cosmetic changes in the Council of State. The new team, as if by design, was eventually left to surrender hastily to the victorious EPRDF forces. The last



minute Cabinet reshuffle that brought in Tesfaye Dinka as Prime Minister and Tesfaye Tadesse as Foreign Minister could not avert the inevitable downfall of the regime.

In retrospect, few might have thought at the time that the President had set his mind on fleeing the country when the going got tough. In fact, the day before he left Ethiopia, the President had summoned, privately, a Passport Officer, Yared Meshesha who had served with me in Bonn in the seventies and instructed him to prepare special service passports for his entire family.

As President Mengistu's plane was leaving Addis Ababa Airport on a Tuesday morning in late May, ostensibly for a tour of army recruitment centres in the South, the new Foreign Minister Tesfaye Tadesse who was arriving from Tokyo to take up his post was rushed to a hastily called meeting of the new cabinet only to learn that the Head of State had just fled the country.

After President Mengistu's flight was announced over the radio, and in not so endearing terms, the army chain of command broke down completely and EPRDF could not be stopped. Even the last ditch effort at a negotiated settlement in London by the new Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka was futile. Teferra Haile Selassie, then Ethiopian Ambassador to the Court of St. James had painstakingly arranged a respectable forum to facilitate an honourable settlement.

The eleventh hour attempt by a group of intellectuals led by Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam that had approached EPRDF with a suggestion to help establish a caretaker government and an offer by ex-royalists to form an advisory council for the victorious forces was too late, because EPRDF was already the government.

\  
Besides, since the US mediation team led by Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen had already wily-nily recognized EPRDF's dominance over Ethiopia, the negotiations became a futile exercise.

On 26 May, as Prime Minister Tesfaye Dinka left for London for the last-minute negotiations on a *fait accompli* situation, Foreign Minister Tesfaye Tadesse also left for Nigeria to attend the OAU summit in Abuja. Later on he returned to New York to join his family.

Following the failed attempt in London at a negotiated settlement, Tesfaye Dinka, and Dr. Ashagre Yiglettu sought and were granted asylum in the US. Eventually, Tesfaye Dinka and Herman Cohen ended up working in the same office as Senior Advisers to the Global Coalition for Africa, an entity supported and run by the US government. Ambassador Teferra Haile Selassie stayed on in London for some years and produced among other useful works, a well-researched and useful book on the history of Anglo-Ethiopian diplomatic relations.

EPRDF forces reached the gates of Addis Ababa in the early hours of 28 May 1991. As the new rulers advanced on the Grand Palace, the interim Head of State General Tesfaye Gebre Kidan had already sought refuge in the Italian Embassy mainly because it was feared at the time that the demoralized and retreating army or even the conquering army of EPRDF would soon round up at JANMEDA, all high government officials and senior armed forces commanders and summarily execute them. Fortunately that was not the case.

After General Tesfaye and Colonel Berhanu Bayih went unaccompanied into the Italian Embassy They were soon followed by General Addis Tedla. Hailu Yimenu, Wolle Chekol and Fasika Sidelil, later on joined the group as the Derg's hold on power finally crumbled in total disarray.

Immediately after entering Addis Ababa, the EPRDF forces called on all former officials to give themselves up and when the latter did show up the new rulers hoarded them into the former residence of Crown Prince Asfa Wossen that had been converted into a political school by the Derg. Soon, Wolle and Fasika left the Italian Embassy without delay and gave themselves up to the new authorities. This was considered a wise move that paid off as they were eventually released from prison, albeit after several years of detention without charge.

As I was writing this story, those that had chosen to stay as long-term guests of the Italian Embassy, were still there. In

the process two of them had died while still inside the Embassy, Hailu Yimenu, reportedly by suicide a few days after the fall of the regime and later on in 2004 General Tesfaye, in a scuffle with his erstwhile colleague Berhanu Bayih. Wolle died in 2005 of natural causes as a free man.

After the Transitional Government was set up in 1991, with the exception of career diplomats Tibebu Bekele, Hailu Wolde Amanuel, Wossen Beshah, Konjit Sene Ghiorgis, Sahle Worq Zawde, Assefa Wolde and I, all the others were recalled. Six months later, the new EPRDF-led government recalled the rest of us.

When I told my colleagues in the diplomatic corps in Prague about my recall, all of them were concerned about the well being of my family, since the situation in Ethiopia was still volatile. Ambassador Shirley Temple Black was particularly gracious in offering to help me find my way in the US should I wish to emigrate there. She had also made sure that I obtained the necessary visa for all my family. I thanked her for her kind assistance, but chose to return home.

My decision to return home was reinforced when I heard a rather moving interview over the BBC given by Colonel Fisseha Desta, former Deputy to President Mengistu, when he stated that “had he chosen to spare himself of imprisonment by the incoming regime, he had all the facilities to flee the country in good time, but decided to stay, right or wrong, rather than suffer the agony of life in exile”.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### *Return To The New Ethiopia*

By the time we returned to Addis Ababa, our sons Marcos, Henok and Ashenafi had grown up and they could easily be integrated into Ethiopian schools. The entire family returned to Addis Ababa at the end of December 1991, three days before the deadline given to us and found Bole Airport heavily guarded by the militants of the new regime. The driver sent for us from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs processed our entry formalities fast and we settled in our little home.

My first meeting with the new Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin was pleasant. As we reviewed the situation that obtained in Ethiopia then, he asked me to stay on and serve, at least in the interim period, as member of the senior staff. I agreed and was given back my old job of Director of Press and Information. I found Seyoum a very agreeable person and our working relationship soon developed into a lasting friendship even after I left the Ministry some two and a half years later.

My other colleagues that were recalled, also demonstrated unflinching patriotism and returned to Addis, some not so soon, but only after they had wound up their affairs in the respective capitals. This pleased our new Minister.

I served in the Ministry until the Eritrean People's Liberation Front formally declared itself the independent Government in Asmara after what most observers agreed and EPLF itself knew was not really a free and fair referendum. Meanwhile in Addis Ababa, mass dismissals of professionals and academics that had long service records were the order of the day. Soon, I was to be no exception.

Thus, in the absence of Foreign Minister Seyoum, apparently without the knowledge of his Deputy Dr. Tekeda Alemu, Prime Minister Tamrat Layneh, then at the height of his political power, reportedly ordered the separation from the Ministry of many career diplomats. Prime Minister Tamrat was himself to fall out of favour later on. At the time, Tekeda expressed his total surprise at my sudden dismissal, and Seyoum could not undo what was already a *fait accompli*.

The new Prime Minister, though trying to come to grips with the art of governance and statecraft, had several challenges for which he was obviously not well prepared. In addition, influential Eritreans still serving in Addis Ababa were candid about their desire to see Ethiopia at the service of Eritrea and spared no efforts at depriving the new government of human and material resources.

It was public knowledge that they even went as far as advising some gullible members of EPRDF to destroy all ordnance and military hardware inherited from the last regime since, as they claimed, the era of peace had set in after the combined victory of EPLF and EPRDF.

That proved to be a tactical ploy, since the Eritrean President had long-term ambitions to expand his influence at the expense of Eritrea's neighbours. Later on this ploy proved disastrous for Eritrea itself. His attempts against Yemen, Djibouti and the Sudan were counter productive.

President Isaias might have underestimated the resolve of the Ethiopian people when in 1998, despite their initial suspicion of the new rulers, threw in their total support for EPRDF in the fight against Eritrean aggression. In the process, Isaias lost to the UN Peace Keepers control of an area later designated as the so called "Transitional Administrative Zone", twenty five kilometres of territory all along the entire one thousand Kilometre border.

In 2008, the Eritrean regime extended its dispute to the UN itself forcing the latter to withdraw peace keeping forces from the area by denying them access and basic facilities and the United States Administration was considering listing Eritrea among the state sponsors of international terrorism. The issue of the border demarcation and compensation for Eritrean looting of Ethiopian property had yet to find final settlement. The yearning of the Eritrean people for a peaceful co-existence with their Ethiopian kith and kin remained unanswered.

In Ethiopia itself, after 1999, having won the battle, the people and government were turning their attention to other priorities, priorities of healing the wounds caused by past



injustice. After years of internal conflict, a need existed to confront the past. The people were entitled to know what precipitated the wave of vengeance and mayhem that swept across the country in seventeen years of rule by a military led dictatorship.

How was it that the people of Ethiopia came to turn on each other with such ferocity? Why did so many abandon traditions of community and peaceful co-existence? Why were long held and cherished customs and taboos so wantonly discarded? These questions had to be answered.

Obviously, it would have been only through generating such understanding that the horrors of the past could effectively be prevented from occurring again. Knowledge and understanding were the most powerful deterrents against the repeat of dictatorial oppression, conflict and war.

Observers agreed that a truth and reconciliation process on a South African model would have helped. But long drawn trials of former officials after the demise of the Derg that had started shortly after the new regime took power, though they were meant to serve this purpose, could not achieve the desired level of reconciliation.

The Derg was roundly condemned for its carrying out of mass killings. Revolution or no revolution, the life of every individual is sacred and should not be destroyed for want of political power, for power that could be won through simple ballots rather than bullets.

The winds of change that swept the globe in favour of democracy and the rule of law opened new opportunities for EPRDF's Ethiopia to strive to enter into a new era of peace and legality. There was pain and there was gain.

Perhaps a testimony in the late nineteen nineties at the post Mengistu trials given by Tadelech Haile Michael, widow of Berhane Mesqel Redda, is illustrative. Tadelech had spent almost thirteen years as prisoner after the arrest and execution of her husband. She was pregnant at the time of her arrest and although the Derg, without conducting any semblance of legal prosecution, decided that she too should be executed, some compassionate persons down the line of the administrative hierarchy simply could not bring it upon themselves to see a pregnant woman and her unborn child eliminated, just because a decision had been made. There were still some courageous persons that upheld basic values, albeit at their own risk.

During her time in prison, Tadelech was called out again and again to leave her little baby and proceed to her death, but when she came out holding her little baby who was crying all the way, there was no stomach to carry out the order to kill her and she was spared. The last time around, it was only the sudden change of political fortunes of the Derg that saved her.

As she testified before the special court set up by the new regime, she was factual, but not vindictive. Tadelech, serving

as the Ambassador of Ethiopia to France in the new Millennium, and many other victims like her stood taller than their adversaries when the day of reckoning was at hand.

One was thus hoping that the rule of law was beginning to make inroads into the daily lives of all Ethiopians, only to be dashed from time to time by subsequent events such as the May 2005 post-elections disturbances that made the road to peace and democratic governance bumpy. The full amnesty granted in July 2007 to opposition leaders accused of inciting violence and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment, it was hoped, would have signalled the beginning of a healing process for the traumatized people of Ethiopia.

The internalization of a culture of tolerance, accommodation and reconciliation in Ethiopia continued to pose serious challenges. Incidentally, Professor Ephraim Isaac, who was mentioned in earlier chapters of my story, played an important role in 2007 in tirelessly working for the process reconciliation through traditional Ethiopian approach to conflict resolution.

As this book went to print, while the desire for the establishment of the rule of law had yet to be fully satisfied, the condition of poverty could not yet be overcome. Coupled with global food shortages, ethnic, political and religious parochialism continued to impact on the overall situation in Ethiopia.

A former Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia, Teferra Degefe, who, like many of us was victim of the cruelty of the Derg, remarked once that “corruption is an especially aggressive tax with the poor hardest hit by even small demands for bribes or fees when they want public services”. Despite the best intentions and some tangible action by EPRDF, this malaise worsened.

Back in early 1990s, while wholesale dismissals of civil servants were going on, paradoxically, a draft new constitution for a Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, aimed at enhancing the respect for individual and collective rights, the rule of law and democratic governance was tabled for a series of panel discussions and public debates sponsored by Abdul Mohamed’s Inter Africa Group. The Constitution, though deemed not perfect, was workable. The debate on good governance continued.

The new Ethiopian leaders beginning with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi down to those at district levels engaged the public in open debates in matters of development and governance. Live broadcasts of uncensored and sometimes heated parliamentary debates became the norm, unseen in the country’s long history. The new spirit of transparency in governance, reconciliation and renaissance for Ethiopia publicly professed in the new millennium was hoped to enhance conditions that would make the next fifty years better than the last fifty.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### *Call To Humanitarian Services*

Upon leaving the Foreign Ministry in March 1993, I was contemplating my next move in life when in fact I felt more and more a calling for humanitarian service. The human rights situations in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa needed to be addressed and I believed that my experiences in journalism and diplomacy could be useful. I felt I had a calling to pursue these causes as I had already been doing so during my Red Cross years.

Thus, I began my new career as a consultant and simultaneous interpreter at Abdul Mohammed's Inter Africa Group that was at that time organizing the public debates on the draft constitution for a Federal Democratic Ethiopia. Eminent professors were invited from several European countries, Asia and North America as resource persons. Dr. Samuel Assefa was one of them.

This was followed by a string of international consultancy jobs. I began working as a consultant on food security for UNDP and on a GTZ project for re-integration of displaced persons, particularly those that had been affected by the draconian expulsions of Ethiopians that were residing in the former northern Ethiopian province, Eritrea when Isaias Afeworqi and his rag-tag army entered Asmara.

For this task, I spent a number of days in Meqelle, capital of Tigray visiting camps set up for those internally displaced compatriots and conducted a series of interviews on their backgrounds and on what they wished to do to start a new life. The stories they told me of their individual ordeal when they were expelled from their homes in Asmara and other Eritrean towns was reminiscent of the Jewish people's suffering.

At that time, the government in Addis seemed, in the view of many observers, beholden to the Eritrean President's moods and did not seem inclined to expose the atrocities committed by a regime that it had helped attain power in the first place. I also visited camps in Nazareth and Addis Ababa where victims of Eritrean expulsions told similar horror stories.

Although some western NGOs were aware of this state of affairs and tried to provide food and other assistance to the displaced Ethiopians, western media were silent about what was going on in Eritrea after a so called independence from Ethiopia, particularly when it came to human rights abuse. The Eritrean President was their darling.

In the wake of EPLF's entry into Asmara, thousands of unarmed Ethiopian soldiers left the city intact and managed to find refuge in the Sudan. On their way to the western border, however, several of them were brutally dealt with by EPLF combatants. A Sudanese diplomat who flew over western Eritrea at the time recounted to me the story of horror that he

witnessed as a number of retreating Ethiopian soldiers were simply massacred by EPLF militants.

After having gathered all the data and facts that would support an eventual reintegration project, I engaged the services of a good friend and a first rate social scientist, Adey Befeqadu, to write up the project. GTZ found the work convincing and after having redesigned the draft project to meet EU standards, it was submitted to Brussels whereupon substantial assistance was obtained.

After this brief interlude as a consultant in Addis Ababa, I travelled to New York in January 1994. While I was visiting the UN Headquarters, an old friend from University days, Alemayehu Mekonnen, introduced me to a German Human Resources Officer of the Field Operations Division who immediately offered me a job as elections observer in South Africa. Frederic De Klerk's government, the last Apartheid regime, had already released Nelson Mandela from his prison on Robben Island and new elections had to be conducted under UN auspices.

My friend Tesfaye Tadesse, who after the fall of the former regime in Addis had been appointed by the then UN Secretary General Perez de Cuillar as Director of the Anti-Apartheid Division, was now preparing to take up another post as Chief Executive Officer of the UN Office on the border between Iraq and Kuwait. After all, through years of struggle, the Apartheid dossier was nearing its closure.



At the UN, which for years has been at the forefront of the fight against Apartheid, it was finally decided to facilitate the first free and fair elections in South Africa. The situation seemed very volatile. The experiences of veteran diplomats were needed to assist in the electoral process, especially as there was increasing concern with regard to peace and reconciliation at every level of South African society.

For those of us former Ethiopian diplomats that included Ambassadors Berhanu Dinka, Hailu Wolde Amanuel as well as Alemayehu Seifu, Fisseha Yohannes and I, who were recruited for this historic task, it was time to savour the fruits of our many years of effort and finally bury the abominable Apartheid system into the dustbin of history.

Upon arrival in Johannesburg, I had a brief audience with the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Lakdar Brahimi and his Deputy, Angela King. I was then immediately deployed to Eastern Cape Province and operated from our regional office in Port Elizabeth. My work with the peace committees in every constituency in the province went on very well and the working relations that we developed with the former South African Home Affairs Minister Delpurt were cordial. South African nationals working for the Electoral Commission performed superbly and made our work easy.

Although at times serious challenges transpired in the process, the first post Apartheid elections in Eastern Cape and indeed in all of South Africa were concluded relatively

peacefully. Our mission was accomplished on May 5, 1994 culminating in the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as first President of Post Apartheid South Africa. That was a UN success story. Besides the colourful diploma awarded to me and my other UN colleagues, the best recognition for the several years of struggle we had waged was that finally South Africans were enabled to take their destiny into their own hands. The events that unfolded in 2008 when African immigrants, traders and refugees that had settled in South Africa were beaten and robbed on uncontrollable scale by xenophobic South African gangs were certainly not the reward that other Africans had expected from their South African brothers and sisters.

While South Africa was celebrating the dawn of a new era, and as my colleagues and I were leaving Johannesburg, Rwanda was engulfed in its biggest humanitarian crisis following a few months earlier, the worst genocide the African continent had ever known. Hutu soldiers had drawn the attention of the international community away from the successes of peaceful South African elections, to problems of refugees and internal displacement resulting from the genocide perpetrated on the Tutsi minority. When the Rwandan Peoples Forces led by Colonel Paul Kagame liberated the country from the Interhamwe forces, the need for humanitarian assistance to returning refugees was overwhelming.

Highly placed officials in the Geneva-based Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), particularly

Burundian Nicholas Bwakira and Ethiopian UNHCR Special Envoy Chefique Dessalegn were coordinating assistance to Rwandan refugees that were returning from Congo. UNHCR needed our Red Cross expertise in refugee care to assist Rwandan returnees from Goma in the DRC and rehabilitate health care centres in Rwanda.

Dr, Dawit, who was experienced in refugee care and had already been in touch with the UN soon presented a rapid deployment plan to UNHCR that would engage African humanitarian workers to assist Rwanda. Thus, Dr. Dawit, assisted by Costantinos Berhe-Tesfu and myself and with the unreserved backing of Bwakira and Chefique, started mobilizing in June 1994 resources for quick intervention in Rwanda and set up the first African indigenous non-governmental organization, Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA). Dawit and Costantinos had, at that time, lost their high profile Red Cross jobs in the string of wholesale expulsions conducted on the orders of Prime Minister Tamrat Layneh.

My first assignment by AHA was thus to serve as field operations Director in Rwanda where the 1994 genocide had already claimed the lives of over one million people. We immediately formed a team of medical doctors, nurses and administrators and set about recruiting other personnel with the help of our contacts in the OAU and in the UN Economic Commission for Africa. We all arrived in Kigali in early July 1994, where the US army had just taken control of Kigali

Airport. Elsewhere in Rwanda, the Tutsi-led RPF was conducting mopping up operations.

Our first task in Rwanda was to literally help clean up streets and health centres of stench from dead bodies in a number of sites. We also assisted in the creation and setting up of the new Ministry of Social Reinsertion and Rehabilitation, working closely with the United Nations Mission in Rwanda, UNAMIR, and the UN Country Team. The new Rwandan government led by Colonel Paul Kagame was very supportive.

In Rwanda, besides physical reconstruction efforts, we developed a program for psychosocial trauma management that was initiated by Dr. Laqech Dresse and supported by UNIFEM. Soon UNICEF, under the leadership of a Canadian Humanitarian Activist, Nigel Fisher, also took the lead in assisting those victims of genocide and terror that needed to be not only physically rehabilitated, but also psychologically treated.

In our fieldwork in Rwanda, I was assisted by Dr. Yonas Tegegne, a very able Ethiopian General Practitioner, Dr. Ba of Guinea, Dr. Charles of Senegal as well as our health officers and dedicated nurses drawn from Malawi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Benin. They all practiced their learned skills with passion and compassion.

Our presence in Rwanda made a big impact on humanitarian activity and was highly appreciated by our

hosts. Our networking with the UN Country Team and indeed with Kagame's government was so effective that Ethiopian Force Commanders in the UN Mission felt we were their Embassy in Kigali. It was a pleasure to work for the same cause of peace with our compatriots who we found, to our pride, were fully dedicated to helping the people of that unfortunate country.

Our successful humanitarian intervention in Rwanda prompted UNHCR to invite us to carry out the same kind of refugee care programs in Uganda and Angola. AHA Management Board decided that I should open our new field mission in Angola that also meant working in the dangerous UNITA held-areas in the Zambezi River valley bordering Zambia.

In Luanda, AHA's work was highly appreciated by the government, which in fact designated the Minister of Social Insertion, Albino Malungo, to be our main interlocutor and facilitator. The authorities in the rebel-held areas also cooperated in our efforts to rehabilitate the much needed health centres.

My bitter sweet moment came in December 1995, while I was coordinating rehabilitation work in Cazombo, in the Moxico province, and I received two calls from Addis Ababa. The first was to inform me that my father Aleqa Shiawl-Kidanekal had passed away and I was expected for the funeral. The second call was from UNICEF in New York for

me to take up the post of Regional Adviser on vulnerabilities and emergencies, based in Abidjan, the Ivory Coast.

Thus, I rushed back to Ethiopia from the remote Angolan provincial town of Cazombo and as communications and air links were difficult I could reach Holetta only on the third day after the burial of my father. Though belated, my arrival in Holetta was a comfort to my aging stepmother, Mama Fanaye who in fact died only two years later.

The UNICEF assignment was another demanding task, but more interesting as it entailed field research and analyses and I took the offer without any hesitation. Notwithstanding my new move, I remained Board Member of Africa Humanitarian Action. AHA was a labour of love and continued to develop into a viable international NGO with wider networks and activities in the Continent. The Gold medal for humanitarian service awarded to us the founding members, at its tenth anniversary in 2004, was recognition to the dedicated services of the entire AHA staff and supporters.

In Abidjan, I met Dr. Carel de Rooy, a Brazilian of Dutch extraction who was the Emergencies Coordinator. Together we developed, through a year and a half of laborious research, an internal handbook on emergency forecasting and preparedness.

I crisscrossed the length and breadth of west and Central Africa that the project covered and came up with a product that was much appreciated by the then Regional UNICEF

Director, a former Norwegian Cabinet Minister, Thorild Skardt and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy.

My Brief stay in Abidjan had also its fringe benefits. There I met, besides my former colleague Ambassador Wossen Beshah, my old friend Tamrat Kebede who had taken up a position as Research and Development Officer at the African Development Bank and my friend from Debre Berhan and University College days Alemayehu Seifu, the Administrative Officer of the Bank as well as Arega Worqu, Secretary General of the African Coffee Organization and other prominent Ethiopians. As a small, closely-knit Ethiopian community in Abidjan, we led a happy life in tranquil and relatively well-developed city that was then unaffected by the turmoil prevailing in the rest of Africa. Years later, however, I was dismayed to see Abidjan deteriorating into chaos as warring military factions tore Cote d'Ivoire into two unmanageable halves, north and south.

In December 1996, just as the election for a new secretary general of the United Nations was underway at the General Assembly, upon the recommendation of Nigel Fisher, by now UNICEF's Head of Emergency Operations and his deputy David Bassiouni, I was tasked to make a series of presentations in New York on our findings of emergency forecasting research in west and central Africa.

After arrival in New York, I began to brief various agencies on our work in West Africa. In one of the sessions,

as I began to brief a small gathering at UNDP, participants sent to that meeting by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, DHA took keen interest. They immediately informed Under-Secretary General Yasushi Akashi that DHA needed to set up an Early Warning Unit and that I would be the appropriate person to head it. I thus got inducted as a senior officer in the UN Secretariat without ever having sought nor applied for such a high-level job and a formidable challenge.

In the meantime the General Assembly denied Egypt's Boutros Ghali a second term and with the requisite support, the distinguished international civil servant from Ghana, Kofi Annan, was elected Secretary General. I knew Kofi when he served in Ethiopia as a young UN official in the sixties charged with human resources at the UNECA. I was happy he got the job.

Kofi Annan and I did not meet again until after I joined the UN some thirty years later. Nonetheless, I have been observing his rise to fame and glory and always regarded him as a role model. Soft spoken, astute and compassionate, endowed with the sharp diplomatic skills, he embodied the best of what African tradition could offer to the rest of the world.

Kofi Annan grew steadily in his job as an international civil servant in the personnel, administrative and financial spheres, and after a brief and controversial period as Head of UN Peace Keeping, he was elected in 1996 at the UN General Assembly as Secretary General.



The first term for the new Secretary General was smooth. He was widely respected as confidence-builder and a trusted leader, endowed with qualities that made the choice easier for the Nobel Committee to award him the coveted Peace Prize. He gave leadership on a number of issues and worked tirelessly to reform the U.N. On many important issues, he was way ahead of the membership.

In his second term, however, Kofi Annan was caught up in controversies when he publicly declared the Iraq war illegal. Critical members of the Security Council that had put up the “coalition of the willing” to dismantle the Saddam Hussein regime, did not lend him the support he required. He had, however, ensured UN presence in Iraq despite all the dangers and hardship he knew that UN staff would face in being deployed there. At the same time, Kofi ably carried the unconditional support of the so-called Third World and represented African wisdom and human compassion in the exercise of his duties.

Kofi Annan has remained the quintessential world statesman and mediator. He patiently steered to a peaceful end, temporarily at least, the negotiations following the post election crisis in Kenya in 2008. It was a matter of great pride for Africa that Kofi succeeded in his effort to bring the opposing parties in Kenya to their senses and agree to form a grand coalition government.

In this noble task, Kofi managed to spare the people of Kenya continuation of the agony that they had endured in

over two months of ethnic-centred violence that had irrupted at the beginning of the year. Thanks to the efforts of Kofi and his team that included Graca Machel, Kenyans could finally wish themselves a “Happy New Year”, belatedly, in March.

As this book was going to print, Kenyans were still trying to heal the wounds and come to terms with their own situation to put in place a lasting solution and a constitutional framework that would ensure sustained democratic development. Kofi was a happy guest of honour at the inauguration on April 2008 of the Grand Coalition Government for Kenya. President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga could thus turn their attention to the task of nation building.

Back in 1996, Many Ethiopian diplomats who knew Kofi’s predecessor, Boutros Ghali, had no reason to regret the latter’s departure from that high office since they perceived the Egyptian Secretary General as the one person responsible for Ethiopia’s problems with regard to the Nile waters. They felt Ghali worked tirelessly for Egypt’s attempts at hegemony over the Horn of Africa and for the dismemberment of Eritrea from Ethiopia.

As I began my work in New York in March 1997, my able colleagues, Elizabeth Kassinis, US citizen of Greek origin, Adeel Ahmed of Pakistan and Frank Sedlak, another US citizen as well as my Assistant, Justine from Haiti, soon set about building a database for emergency forecasting and what later on became the Humanitarian Early Warning Systems

(HEWS). The model was soon adopted and improved upon by other departments within the Secretariat and we coordinated our diverse efforts through the Framework for Coordination.

Our Senior Supervisor, Mr. Yasushi Akashi, a soft spoken Japanese Diplomat, would politely ask where the next humanitarian crisis was likely to occur and I together with my immediate supervisors, Chinese born UN technocrat Ed Tsui, and the sharp Pakistani Deputy to Mr. Akashi, Fareed Shaukat, would bring to the Under Secretary General's attention the likely scenario which most of the time was accurate.

Not long after I joined DHA, Mr. Akashi went into retirement to take up Presidency of the Hiroshima Foundation in his own country. Brazilian-born Sergio Vieira de Mello, a younger and flamboyant career UN official, who was then Deputy to Ms. Sadako Ogata of UNHCR, was appointed to take over Mr. Akashi's post.

Sergio began his new assignment with reforming DHA, later renamed the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. From his past African experience, he had learnt to work closely with the OAU and in his new capacity he wanted to cement even closer cooperation with the Continental Organization.

Thus, in June of 1998, Sergio appointed me as Liaison Officer of OCHA with the OAU. This new appointment

provided me with two-year tenure as a United Nations international staff and UN Humanitarian Affairs representative in my own country.

Regarding my own country Ethiopia and the newly created African state of Eritrea, no one, apart from President Isaias Afeworqi himself, knew well in advance that relations that began so well with the new regime in Addis would go sour that fast.

On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1998, I had a coffee meeting in New York with Ambassador Haile Menkerios of Eritrea when suddenly he got a call from Asmara telling him that his President had ordered and carried out an attack on Ethiopia. Both Haile and I had always discussed how the two parts of former Ethiopia could come together again for a collaborative and peaceful future.

That sudden twist of fate shocked us and the unfolding events in the Horn of Africa took both of us by surprise. As it turned out, although Haile served Isaias at the UN, he could not continue to ignore the obvious. Eritrea's aggression was illegal. He also got disaffected and defected when Isaias started throwing into prison all those EPLF veterans that he considered a threat to his grip on power.

When Under-Secretaries General, Sir Kieran Prendergast and Sergio De Mello jointly proposed to Secretary General Kofi Annan that the two departments should open a special UN office in Addis Ababa to liaise with the Organization of

African Unity and the Economic Commission for Africa, I was given another challenging assignment.

Mamadou Kane, a veteran Mauritanian diplomat and I were sent to Addis Ababa in June 1998 to undertake the task of monitoring activities related to political and humanitarian issues and follow up on agreed strategies between the UN and the OAU.

Though the then Secretary General of the OAU, Salim Ahmed Salim was very helpful as a friend to both of us, the first two years of the establishment of the office were challenging. The OAU itself was undergoing a long-overdue restructuring process and no senior staff could find adequate time for serious engagement with the new UN Liaison Office.

The Ethio-Eritrean war had already broken out and there was a lot of work to do. Our networking with all key players helped us ensure that the UN Secretary General, through his Algerian-born UN Special Envoy, Mohamed Sahnoun, was fully engaged in the peace process that led to the Algiers agreement in 2000.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

### *Serving The Human Rights Cause*

In the late nineties and in the new Millennium, I was also occasionally tasked by the Turin-based UN Staff College and sent to various parts of the world as trainer in Early Warning and Preventive Action. It was during one of those training sessions while in Mombasa that I got a call from Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights to join her team in Geneva. After our brief discussion in her office, Mary appointed me her Senior Communications Adviser and Spokesman for the World Conference against Racism. Working with Mary Robinson, with her Deputy Bertie Ramcharan, and with the World Conference Team headed by our Indian Executive Coordinator, Jyoti Shankar Singh was a great learning experience.

I had first met Mary Robinson in 1994 when, in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, she, as President of Ireland, came to Kigali to see for herself the plight of the people. We all noted then that she was a brave and humane leader. Mary, the compassionate leader that she was, was the first Head of State from the North to come to Africa at the time and express solidarity with Somalis and Rwandans. The NGO group that I coordinated as Chairperson had an extensive panel discussion with President Robinson and she impressed us all as a person that really cared.

In the eighteen months before the Conference in Durban in September 2001, Jyoti and I worked together in the planning of all the regional preparatory seminars in Warsaw, Dakar, Bangkok, Santiago and Brussels. There were also a series of Bureau meetings in Geneva where documents and draft resolutions had be negotiated and worked out. In the process we could mobilize the support and full involvement of famous film stars, CNN anchors, civil society organizations the world over and indeed all governments except those former colonial powers that could not accept the notion of reparations for past handling of slaves and minorities.

The US in particular was sensitive to several points in the draft resolutions for Durban, as it was facing mounting demands of astronomic proportions for reparations from African Americans to redress historical injustices that their forefathers had suffered due to slavery.

Then there was the issue of the Middle East, where the Simon Wiesenthal Foundation and other Jewish organizations were putting up a fight against Palestinians who they accused of trying to convert the World Conference into a forum to question Israel's very existence.

Notwithstanding all these complications, the World Conference served as a reminder to the International Community that if real peace were to be achieved in the world, issues of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance had to be tackled in earnest.

Despite strong opposition by the United States and Israel, the two states that finally boycotted the Durban Conference, Mary Robinson and her team rose up to the challenge of rallying support for a workable declaration and plan of action. Though they came long after the Durban Conference, Apologies offered to the Aborigines by the new Australian Government in 2008 and the nomination of Young Senator Barak Obama as the first black Democratic Party candidate for President of the United States, were but the result of long years of struggle against racism.

In the processes leading up to the World Conference in Durban, Mary Robinson conducted a two-year long aggressive media campaign and elaborate networking with key players all over the world. The Millennium Conference at the UN in particular gave the High Commissioner the opportunity to rally the support of almost all known Hollywood film stars and leaders from all over the world. Secretary General Kofi Annan took the leading role in promoting the ideals of the World Conference.

Over one hundred and fifty world leaders, religious leaders and Presidents of Parliaments signed the High Commissioner's Vision Declaration. As the High Commissioner's Public Affairs Officer for the Conference, it was my honor to meet the leaders and facilitate the signing of the Declaration.

At the Conference itself, Ritz Khan, former CNN news anchor as well as other internationally renowned



representatives of TV networks and famous film stars Danny Glover, Harry Belafonte, the Reverend Jessie Jackson and other important personalities were on hand to assist our team in the successful holding of the World Conference.

South African and most international daily papers and electronic media were not only supportive in widely disseminating the daily proceedings of the Conference, but were kindly commenting on my own performance as Media Liaison for the World Conference.

Upon completion of our project for the World Conference, Mary Robinson encouraged me to apply for an up-coming post of a Regional Representative and Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa for which Bertrand Ramcharan, the Deputy High Commissioner, had already laid the foundations.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

### *Human Rights And Central Africa*

The United Nations General Assembly had decided in 1991 to respond to a growing demand from the eleven member states of the Economic Community of Central Africa, ECCAS, for the establishment of a centre for human rights and democracy. The push for it came not from mainstream human rights activists, but from those working on conflict prevention, peacemaking and peace-building in the region.

The UN Department of Political Affairs had also nurtured active interest in the peace and security of the region. Bertie was tasked with leading the process with the Head of the Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner, Bacre Wali N'Diaye, to assist him.

The one person I knew from my New York days before I joined the Office of the High Commissioner was Professor Bertrand Ramcharan. During his six years in the Office of the High Commissioner, Bertie always provided strong and learned leadership and supported us enthusiastically in the discharge of our responsibilities. He loyally assisted Mary Robinson in steering the 2001 World Conference.

Bertie, a native of Georgetown, Guyana, had begun his UN career as a human rights expert some thirty years ago. He joined Ms. Robinson as Deputy in November 1998 and

served in many important functions. Prior to his assignment as Deputy High Commissioner, he had served as Director in the Department of Political Affairs and rendered valuable services. As a seasoned intellectual of international repute and of very high academic standing, his knowledge of Africa is deep. He continued to serve as Deputy to Sergio de Mello when the latter took over from Mary Robinson in 2002.

When Sergio and four other UN colleagues were killed in a terrorist attack on the UN office in Baghdad in August 2003, Secretary General Kofi Annan named Bertrand Ramcharan High Commissioner *ad interim* at the level of Under-Secretary General. Bertie discharged his responsibilities ably with skill and diligence that the crisis situation required.

The Yaoundé Centre that I directed had therefore the fullest support from Bertie. He and his family, particularly his gracious wife Lily and his son Robin, have always remained loyal friends.

Since the 1960s, Central Africa has witnessed conflicts in almost all the countries of the sub-region, and those engaged in peace-making and peace-building realized that one of the keys to future prevention of conflict lay in promoting respect for democracy and human rights in the sub-region.

This realization led ECCAS to call for the establishment of the Centre. Bertie Ramcharan thus spelled out clearly the challenge that lay in building upwards through groundwork

with Government agencies, educators, judges and the legal profession, law-enforcement agencies, the military and other professional groups offering at the same time a library and research base for educators and human rights promoters. This, he rightly felt, would deepen the quest for human rights promotion and protection within the region.

There were sensitivities in ECCAS and indeed on the part of the French government about the Centre. Initially Bertie, and later on my staff and I, had to engage in diplomatic efforts to help lay the basis for smooth working relations for the future. Personal diplomacy helped, and as the first Director of the Centre, I did my job in building up good working relations with General Sylvain Goma, Executive Secretary of ECCAS, a former Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo and also with key figures like the Prime Minister of Cameroon, Peter Mafani Musonge, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Francois Xavier Ngoubeyou and the colourful Foreign Minister of Gabon, Mr. Jean Ping, who in 2004 was elected President of the General Assembly and Chairperson of the African Union in 2008.

Other key players in the region have also been helpful. The UN Resident Coordinator in Cameroon, British born Patricia De Mowbray, was very instrumental in rallying the UN Country team in supporting the Centre's activities.

During the Centre's inaugural conference of Ministers of Justice and Presidents of Supreme Courts in March 2002, presided over by High Commissioner Mary Robinson, the

French representatives did not want the UN to have the limelight. For historical reasons, their diplomats felt they were exclusive owners of any political process in the region and did not make our start easier.

Since France was at that time funding a few human rights related seminars and workshops elsewhere, Mary Robinson decided that a representative of the French government be invited to attend the ceremony as a matter of courtesy. However, when the French envoy, a former Minister, Bernard Stasi, came to Yaoundé, his Ambassador, Jean-Paul Veziant, insisted that Stasi be given the role of a keynote speaker. This I rejected outright, telling him that the High Commissioner came to Cameroon for exactly the same purpose and that there could only be one keynote address. Finally I suggested that Stasi could be allowed to read a message from President Chirac, should he have one. By doing that we were able to satisfy the Envoy's desire for visibility and the highly publicized inaugural ceremony went very well.

The Yaoundé Centre was thus a result of hard work by my colleagues in Geneva, particularly Bertie and our Africa Coordinator Tokunbo Ige of Nigeria. My staff in Yaoundé, notably Dr. Musifiky Mwanasali of DRC, Oumar Ba of Mauritania and Fatou Thiam of Senegal as well as our local assistants Dorothee Ndoh and Marie Claire Simo of Cameroon did an excellent job. The Centre worked to fill the gap in the struggle for a noble cause in a sub-region that has seen searing conflicts and was wracked by poverty and poor governance.

The challenges of taking forward the human rights agenda in such a situation were indeed manifold. Still, as Bertie Ramcharan was to comment later on, the Centre set about these challenges with grit and with conviction. For those of us in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, what we believed would count was whether educators, professional groups and civil society in the region came to see the Centre as an institution of value. To our satisfaction, they did.

During my missions to the member states of ECCAS, what struck me was the enormous richness of every one of them. Eight out of the eleven countries produced petrol. The exceptions were the Central African Republic, Rwanda and Burundi. Yet, tarmac roads connected none of the capitals in the sub-region. None of the countries was able to sustain an airline worth its name.

In Central Africa, as indeed in many countries of the Third World, it seemed to me that leaders chose their voters and not the other way round. The voters were simply forced to mark the ruling party candidates in the ballots and cast their votes into boxes that were most often stuffed with extra pre-marked ballot papers. Thus, one never failed to notice the glaring lack of requisite commitment on the part of the leaders in the region to ensure respect for the rule of law, economic and cultural rights for the peoples whose fate they could decisively change. Leaders were creative in finding ways to perpetuate their hold on power. Sadly, as in other parts of

Africa, here too, the best of their educated citizens lived in the Diaspora in Europe and America, choosing greener pastures rather than rendering themselves vulnerable to the whims of their leaders.

Bertie had stressed from the very beginning that quality and pragmatism would be decisive. We left the final judgment to the over one thousand persons of all walks of life that we had trained in the first two years of the Centre's existence, in raising their capacity in the area of human rights and democracy. We laid the basis for future generations of human rights activists to draw benefits from the services of the Yaoundé Centre. Already, as this book went to print, some of our former interns were taking up ministerial and other leading positions in their respective countries.

When we had our one of regular regional peace and security consultations with member states in January 2204 in Brazzaville, I had an informal meeting with the Foreign Ministers of the two Republics sharing the River Congo, Rudolf Adada from Brazzaville and Leonard Okitundu from Kinshasa. I said to them: "Look, the shortest distance across the river between Kinshasa and Brazzaville is just three Kilometres. Yet both of you, being wealthy states, could easily dedicate one-day's production of petrol for the purposes of building a bridge; why is this not possible?"

Both of them smiled and told me that the plan had been on the drawing board for a long time now and all that is needed

was to convince the leaders. I was wondering why they were hesitant to press such issues with their leaders.

In view of the lack of trust that is pervasive among leaders in the sub-region, promoting trust and strengthening confidence-building measures remained formidable challenges. The leaders always felt insecure of their future if they left their office in good time since they suspected that they would either be killed or at the mildest lynched by their own people once they left their seats of power. According to my Colleague, Ambassador Nateus Maria Rita of Sao Tome and Principe, the people, meaning succeeding generations of leaders never took care of their predecessors that were disposed to leave office in good time. Thus fearing the fate that awaits them once out office, invariably all despotic leaders remained prisoners of their own power. Incidentally, the small island state of Sao Tome and Principe is one of the very few countries in Africa where past Presidents were allowed to live freely and were treated with dignity.

In a region where conflicts continued, economic integration remained slow and political integration minimal, perhaps more than in any other part of the continent. This meant continued lack of a regional locomotive to provide effective leadership to realize a viable political and economic union. At the national-level, invariably in all countries, institutional capacities needed to be strengthened further for implementing integration. Yoseph Assefa, Director General of African Insurance Association who was based in Duala at the time also faced the same frustrating problems in his area



of operation, i.e., in the modernization of insurance and banking.

Though still not full-proof, former UN Secretary General's Kofi Annan's efforts for a lasting solution to border disputes between Cameroon and Nigeria were exemplary and could be replicated to deal with emerging disputes between Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon. All these countries had simmering disputes over common frontier areas and territorial waters that are endowed with natural resources.

The priority issue in Central Africa, however, remained the empowerment of the populations to be beneficiaries of their natural resources. Genuine grievances by ordinary people, especially demands for a better allocation of critical resources were rarely heard or ever addressed.

The vast majority of the people most visibly in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Chad, Cameroon and both Congo and DRC were increasingly disconnected from the leadership in nearly all matters that affect their livelihood. This was true to a large extent also in the relationship between the top echelons of power and middle level officials.

This state of affairs continued to encourage worsening corruption in the mildest sense and, in worst cases led to violence as a means to be heard or to access resources. The strategic importance of the region, which borders the Gulf of Guinea in terms of world energy supplies, could not be underestimated. Peaceful development needed to be

undertaken in earnest before the people demanded their God-given rights through violence.

Advocating for the respect and protection of human rights in similar situations was a daunting task. However, the achievements of the UN, which were by no means negligible, continued to give us some hope. Later on, unfolding situations such the one in Darfur posed challenges of formidable proportions.

Bertie, knowing my earlier experience in the Sudan assigned me to in May 2004 to be part of the Human Rights Fact Finding Team in the wake of the crisis that unfolded in the western region of Darfur. I could thus see first hand the intricate problems that beset the region. I had seen Darfur in the seventies when I was serving as the ranking Ethiopian diplomat in the Sudan. I was happy to play a role in the new UN challenge.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### *Darfur, The Millennium Challenge*

Darfur is a large area, 256,000 square kilometres in size, constituting the western region of Sudan, nearly three quarters the size of Ethiopia. It is home to an estimated five million people, made up of a complex tribal mix. Though endowed with yet untapped resources, large areas of Darfur have been prone to drought and desertification, intensifying demands on its more fertile lands. In recent decades, areas of Darfur have been subject to sporadic inter-tribal clashes over use of resources.

Following mounting concerns regarding respect for human rights in Darfur in early April, the Acting High Commissioner decided to send a mission to Sudan to hold discussions with the authorities and to assess the situation on the ground in Darfur. The Sudanese dragged their feet in granting permission for the mission to take place immediately, but finally relented and our team arrived in Khartoum on 20 April 2004. We did our assessment in the next ten days and returned to Geneva in early May.

For me, although I have kept contact with several Sudanese friends after I had left the Sudan in 1975, seeing the country after nearly thirty-two years was like dropping on another planet. Khartoum had changed beyond my wildest imagination. Despite the civil wars that the country had to endure over the years, the oil wealth has also been used to

develop infrastructure, agriculture and industry. With out the wars, a lot more could have been achieved. In all these years, despite the lingering internal problems, the generosity, friendliness and self-assertive posture of the people have not changed.

We visited the refugee camps and sites along the Chadian border with Sudan, interviewed refugees to obtain a better understanding of the humanitarian and human rights situation. We established from our findings that the people of Darfur continued to endure a severe human rights and humanitarian crisis that the International Community should address without delay.

From early 2003 on, fighting had intensified in the region following the emergence of two armed groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and later the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and the commencement by them of hostilities against the Government. Broadly speaking the SLA and JEM share an ethnic background. They come primarily from the Zaghawa, Fur and Masaalit tribes. They also appeared to share similar political demands, which were essentially for the Khartoum authorities to address.

It was felt at the UN that it was the manner of the response by the Government of Sudan, which led to the current crisis in Darfur. Following a string of SLA victories in the first months of 2003, Khartoum appeared to have sponsored a militia composed of a loose collection of fighters of

apparently Arab background, mainly from Darfur, known as the “Janjaweed”, to repel the rebel attacks.

The conflict that appeared to have been an ethnically based rebellion had been met allegedly with an ethnically based response, building in large part, on long-standing but largely hitherto contained tribal rivalries. In certain areas of Darfur, the Janjaweed were said to have supported the regular armed forces in attacking and targeting civilian populations suspected of supporting the rebellion, while in other locations it appeared that the Janjaweed played the primary role in such attacks with military in support.

During our meetings with President Omar Al-Bashir, Vice-President Thaha and the Foreign Minister, Dr. Osman, our team strongly advised that it would be futile to engage in denials of a situation that was so evident and gave recommendations on how to satisfy the demands of the international community for a speedy resolution of the humanitarian and human rights problems in Darfur.

In the midst of all this, some resident western diplomats in Khartoum, among them the British High Commissioner, wanted us to provide them with a scoop to their capitals, and asked us if they, as donors, could get a glimpse of our report before we had even submitted it to the Acting High Commissioner in Geneva. We told them that Abu Dhabi was also a donor and wondered whether they wished that we showed the report also to their Arab colleagues before the High Commissioner saw it and made it available to the

Security Council. Our diplomatic interlocutors knew the procedures, but all the same, they tried. Instead, before we left, we held a debriefing session at the UN Office in Khartoum with invited donors including UK representatives.

The full report of our findings was submitted to the Acting High Commissioner who presented it to the Security Council. The Council later on passed a resolution calling on the government of Sudan to address the problem immediately and enable access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict. The council's call fell short of describing the Darfur situation as genocide. This did not satisfy US demands for an outright condemnation of the Sudanese Government. The US had called for the deployment immediately of international peacekeeping forces.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, 2005, shortly before the Summit of the African Union, AU, in Addis Ababa, upon instruction by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, I joined the mission to Darfur lead by the African Union Chairperson, Alpha Omar Konare. Professor Konare, a former President of Mali is a great team leader and wherever we went he posed detailed questions to our Sudanese interlocutors and gave them the same considered counsel that the UN human rights team had given them one month earlier.

During our visit to the three provinces in Darfur, where my friend Dr. Dawit was also invited to join representing AHA as an African civil society organization, Chairman Konare launched the deployment of the first batch of the

African Union Observer Mission to help the Sudanese in tackling the crisis within the context of collaboration between the African, European Union and US before the situation could get out of hand.

It was at this juncture that the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Justice Louise Arbour of Canada, who had already been named to the post in May of that year, took up her new assignment in Geneva. Justice Arbour was actively involved in the Rwanda genocide trials in the late nineties and was very much aware of what the Darfur situation would portend for the future of human rights protection and promotion in Africa. She therefore made it her first priority, only two days after she took up her new post, to attend the AU summit in Addis Ababa.

This mission provided the new High Commissioner with the opportunity to size up the Sudanese first hand and impress upon them the need for a speedy resolution of the Darfur crisis. At the same time, she could network with the key actors in the continent. As she was to comment at the end of the Summit, her first mission as High Commissioner was baptism in fire.

We had advised Ms. Arbour that it would help if she could visit Darfur as a matter of priority and indeed she toured that unfortunate part of the Sudan in the month of September 2005, after which she presented her report to the Security Council on the humanitarian and human rights situation in



Darfur. The Council took more than enough time to eventually act on Mrs. Arbour's recommendations.

What is most surprising is the inaction of the Arab League that though it also learnt of the contents of the report of the High Commissioner, in all its frequent deliberations, that Organization seemed to pretend that the Darfur problem never existed and never offered, officially at least, any wise counsel to the Government of Sudan. But then no diplomat worth his career was surprised because the Arab League, since it was set up in 1945 with the aim of co-ordinating the relations and activities of its members, has allowed them only to discuss matters of Arab concern and express differences of opinion.

When compared with the Organization of African Unity/ African Union that has achieved a great deal in the struggle against colonialism and Apartheid, and has involved itself in peace keeping in Darfur and elsewhere in Africa, the Arab League has turned out as little more than a talking shop. Its focus has been inter-Arab conflict that set Syria, close allies with Iran, against its pro-Western rivals, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Backed by American arms and aid, the latter pair dominated the Arab League since its inception. Apart from pomp and ceremony of its regular summit meetings, the Arab league has found no adequate time to consider in all seriousness the conflict and the human rights situation in Darfur.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### *Assignment In Baghdad, The Last Days Of Saddam Husain*

When I arrived in Baghdad in October 2005, Saddam Hussein had already been captured and his trial was under preparation. Though my assignment was principally to draft the strategic plan for UN activities in Iraq, my human rights background and my particular interest in the fate of that unfortunate country and indeed that of Saddam Hussein, could not keep me away from following closely the events that unfolded in Iraq until I accomplished my mission one year later.

The West saw Saddam Hussein as: President, politician, dictator and the enemy, depending on the times. For observers who witnessed the circus surrounding his trial, what his adversaries did not fully realize was that he was also a true showman and brilliant media manipulator. The Baghdad courtroom was like the Big Brother house such as the one depicted in George Orwell's "1984", with extra bombproof reinforcements and retina scans in the roofs. The proceedings were watched by millions of people who seemed not to take it seriously but were nonetheless gripped by the spectacle. The trial demonstrated that Saddam, once the feared dictator, now vanquished by the Coalition, was back at centre stage.

The Baghdad court proceedings were supposed to draw a line under the Coalition's involvement in Iraq, lay the

cornerstone for the rule of law and usher in the rehabilitation into the modern world of Iraq's twenty six million people. Instead, they strengthened Saddam's supporters, gave new faith to Saddam's like-minded friends, believers in Arab Socialism, the Ba'ath Party in Syria, creating divisions across the Middle East.

In theory, due process should have reduced Saddam to a common man guilty of heinous crimes. But by putting him on exhibition in a Baghdad courtroom, the US-led coalition unwittingly enabled him to fulfil his own prophecy that he would one day demonstrate his patriotism and courage by giving his life for his country and his people. Saddam's performance in the dock acted as a narcotic on the nation he once ruled. A hypnotist could not have done a better job. For the Iraqis it was all very real. During the proceedings, beginning his first formal defence, he used the opportunity to call on all Iraqis to 'resist invaders' and praised the insurgency as 'resistance to the American invasion'. When he was reprimanded for using the proceedings as political platform, he replied quickly: "Had it not been for politics, I wouldn't be here".

On the first day of the trial Saddam warned: 'I do not recognise the body that has authorised you {the court} and I don't recognise this aggression.' He repeatedly stated the same every time he rose to defend himself.

The US established the mechanism for the trial, gathered witnesses, managed its security and orchestrated the media

coverage. But for diplomatic purposes, they could not run it themselves, and in handing it over to the Iraqis, many observers thought that they lost control of its proceedings and its outcome. Saddam himself, until his death by hanging, appeared more focused and physically fit.

While I was in Baghdad, venturing beyond the Green Zone was risky - a sad and shocking experience. There were daily killings, bomb attacks and these escalated throughout and after Saddam's trial. Alarm sirens were sounded most of the day and during intermittent rocket and mortar attacks that targeted the Defence Ministry, a site near DIWAN School building that served as the provisional UN offices, every one of us had to wear helmets and bulletproof vests, and, assemble in designated shelters. Everyone in Baghdad was at risk - except Saddam who was perhaps the most heavily protected person in the whole world. His masterstroke has been making himself hard to kill. His trial was intended to be fair, but he manipulated it in his cunning attempt to compromise every possible outcome.

The wider implications for politics in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq itself, of the hanging of Saddam Hussein were difficult to predict. If the trial were abandoned it would have been dismissed as a mockery. If it were transferred to The Hague, his lawyers would have claimed a moral victory, regardless of the outcome.

Ever since the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 by Colonel Abdul Kharim Qassim, a judicial extravaganza has

accompanied every regime change in Iraq. Qassim's Ba'athist coup was marked by mass arrests of supposed Zionists, their confessions broadcast nationwide while their bodies swung from gallows in Baghdad's Liberation Square. Saddam's presidency was inaugurated 11 years later by the discovery of a new nest of traitors, with well-publicised accounts of remorse and executions all round. The condemnations have been filmed since 1958 - The coerced admissions and grisly executions of yesteryear do not of course compare directly to Saddam's trial and subsequent execution by hanging.

In 200, though justice was always a stated goal of the Coalition of the willing, no senior lawyer in said the coalition ever considered adequately whose justice was being pursued. Every trial has always reflected the principles of the authority staging it. While traditions of dictatorship resonated among Iraqis, the US and its proxies had to insist on such things as due process - if only to satisfy the folks back home. The result was a divide between Iraqi and western expectations.

Even the suggestion that the trial be exported to The Hague was no solution, for that ignored why Iraq was hosting it in the first place. Its primary purpose was not to find facts or hear from victims, South African truth commission-style, but to punish guilt, educate the Iraqi public – and satisfy expectations of victims of Saddam's repressive rule.

A significant legacy has been in 1945 with a warning uttered by Robert Jackson, the then US chief prosecutor at Nuremberg: "If you are determined to execute a man in any

case, there is no occasion for a trial.” Events in the Green Zone in 2006 led me to conclude that the trials were clearly aimed at prosecuting Saddam very publicly to death.

In 1945 Sir Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of Britain, initially opposed the prosecution of senior Nazis, arguing that they should be dealt with on capture. It was Joseph Stalin of the USSR, who, bent on showmanship, demanded a public judicial hearing. Historians concluded then that legalism worked at that time only because it was imposed over the heads of a vanquished nation, Germany.

The new Iraq, after the demise of Saddam, however, was supposedly a sovereign ally of the US and its citizens were theoretically the beneficiaries of justice borne out of their liberation from Saddam’s dictatorship, not its targets. Saddam’s crimes certainly deserved to be addressed in strictly legal terms. International observers of events in post-Saddam Iraq agreed that the former dictator’s trial was more of a show rather than a human rights milestone. Under the circumstances, could it have been different?

The closing of my diplomatic and international civil service career, my last assignment as Head of Strategic Planning for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) thus coincided with the a new chapter in Iraq, with the country engulfed in daily violence and killings that proliferated into un-manageable sectarian strife. Towards the end of my mission Iraq was a country broken and disintegrated. Kurdistan in the north asserted itself as an

independent state in all but name. To the south the Shiite religious parties had created an Islamic regime parts of which were run by fundamentalists reminiscent of Afghanistan's former Taliban rulers. The Sunni Arab centre remained sort of a political vacuum, where, to the extent that there is any local authority at all, it belonged to tribal sheikhs, former Ba'athists and al-Qaeda. Meanwhile, Iran formerly a sworn enemy of Iraq had emerged as a strongest ally. The situation was exacerbated by intensified attacks, ceaselessly launched by Al Qaeda terrorists. The Mehdi Militia organized by a powerful Shi'a cleric, Mukkada El Sadr, on the one side, and the Sunni militia on the other, continued fighting.

At the end of my mission to Iraq, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Ashraf Qazi, his deputy Michael Schulenberg, Chief of Staff Fareed Zarif, my colleagues and the rest of the staff gave me a warm farewell and I can never forget the special send off given to me by the Fijian UN Guard Unit with whom I had nurtured brotherly relations. They had prepared a special surprise parade in my honour on the office grounds and sang moving songs and showered me with special gifts. After all, the United Nations was all about the nurturing of peace, brotherhood and international understanding. I felt honoured and privileged to have been part of the great community at the service of world peace - the UN staff.

## EPILOGUE

I wrote this book to tell my story and to tell the story of my country Ethiopia in the last half a century; to describe as fairly as I could and as witnessed them first hand, the forces that were competing to subdue its brave people. I also intended to explain the challenges faced by the new generation and to give young and aspiring Ethiopian diplomats a sense of what it is like to be one, under all the circumstances that I attempted to describe.

While writing, I found myself travelling back in time, reliving my childhood, my boyhood and my adult life. I recounted my story feeling as I did then and now. When I was born, Ethiopia had just come out of the ravages of Italian occupation and was struggling to reconstruct itself and advance into the modern era of educational and technical progress.

In the process, Ethiopians have seen regimes come and go and had to endure seemingly endless civil wars and aggression from none other than their immediate neighbours to the north and the east. The problems of underdevelopment and poverty are still with us. The struggle for good governance is ongoing.

Having made the observations that I enumerated in this story, I feel that educated Ethiopians should strive to leave behind a legacy of serious struggle for the socio-economic transformation of the Country. One would hope to see a time



when there is no more talk of hunger, misery and war in Ethiopia. Though Ethiopians should continue to cherish the modest achievements of the past, taking a hard look into the future and our role in shaping it must predicate our history.

I think it was in the post revolution era in France that one young man asked an elderly citizen what he, the elderly person was doing during the French Revolution; the elderly man had a simple answer: "I survived." I too have survived the ups and downs of the last half a century, grateful to the Almighty for all the blessings and lessons of life.

In my work and experience at home, in public service and international service, the UN in Abidjan, Addis Ababa, New York, South Africa, Central Africa, Geneva, Iraq, Nairobi and elsewhere, besides the added advantage of being gainfully employed, my work assignments helped me bring up my children in a sound international environment and gave me the opportunity to know Africa and appreciate its problems, feel for my fellow Africans and continue to struggle for our well-being. It has also helped me broaden my knowledge of the Middle East, especially the intricate problems related to the on-going violence in Iraq and Lebanon.

One of my sons, Henok, educated at the prestigious Sorbonne University in Paris, entered into the diplomatic service immediately upon his return to Addis Ababa. I felt gratified that my son, through dedicated service to his country, was already making his mark as one of the new generation of promising diplomats in the Ethiopian Foreign

Ministry, an institution I loved and whose services I had never wanted to leave

Fully aware that the struggle for democracy, justice and the respect for human rights in the world and particularly in my own country will not be achieved overnight, I continue to be hopeful that success will be achieved in these and other fields of endeavour. Like compatriots of this generation, future generations of Ethiopians will continue to face considerable challenges.

Diplomacy during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie was focused on defending the traditions of the crown and territorial integrity, on the liberation of Africa, on adherence to collective security in the world and on building the foundations of modern education at home. It knew no bounds as the Emperor could interact with diverse partners such as King George V, Queen Elizabeth II, Churchill, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, De Gaulle, Adenauer, Shah Pahlevi, Marshal Tito, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ben Bella, Jomo Kenyatta, Nikita Khrushchev, Salazar, Nehru, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Chou En Lai and Mao Tse Tung.

During the military regime that followed, diplomacy was about dismantling the remnants of feudalism while cementing international solidarity with those that proclaimed their partisanship with the working class. It, therefore, focused mainly on relations with leaders of the Soviet Union and its client states in Eastern Europe, as well as with China, Cuba and the then socialist Yemen. That approach did not bear the

desired fruit, because internally it tried to emulate the repressive nature of the Soviet Union and externally it was conducted at the expense of the good relations with the western world that were painstakingly built over several decades by the Emperor. In terms of economic benefits, the policy of the Derg was detrimental since it deprived Ethiopia of vital Western investment and economic corporation. The regime had also to struggle against all odds, to ensure territorial integrity and unity of Ethiopia. The Derg's focus was mainly on beefing up the war machine.

Diplomacy of today's Ethiopia, I observed, is aimed at promoting and supporting world peace, forging African unity and creating conducive environment for economic development at home and in the region. Economic development and International Corporation with all possible partners has become the focus of the new Millennium's foreign policy. Although challenges posed for Ethiopia by well-known state sponsors of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalists across its eastern border are enormous calling for better military preparedness, independent approach to international relations as practised by Emperor Haile Selassie and his predecessors, in so far as they promoted world peace and Ethiopia's legitimate interests, have been revived.

The challenges of re-engineering relations with Eritrea and, indeed, with all Ethiopia's neighbours cannot be underestimated. The ups and downs of Ethiopia's fortunes may have, albeit temporarily, deprived the country of the

required arsenal of qualified diplomatic practitioners, but there is a great hope of revival in the new dawn.

I continue to serve and another first in my career has just occurred. In 2007, I was nominated by the Government of Ethiopia and tasked by the Council of Defence Ministers of the region to put in place the groundwork for a viable administrative system for the Secretariat of the Nairobi-based East African Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (EASBRICOM), an institution designed to facilitate peace keeping and conflict management in the Eastern African Region within the framework of the African Standby Force (ASF) of the African Union.

I have had a lucky life and I have been blessed with a family and close friends dedicated to the services of country and society. My humble beginnings have helped me withstand the trials of life setting in the process an example, I hope at least for my sons. I remain fortified by the belief that a new dawn has finally arrived for my beloved country, Ethiopia.





**INDEX**

- Abebe Aregay, Ras, 27,30,89  
Abdul Mejid Husain 100,309  
Abdul Mohamed 253  
Abeba Kifle-Egzi, Woizero, 45,65  
Abebe Biqila, Captain 57,71,85  
Abebe Kebede, 158  
Abebe Engidasew 205  
Abraham Gebre Mariam, 13  
Abraham Kidane, Dr. 53  
Abulqassim, Major 113,115  
Addis Tedla, General 207, 244  
Admasseh Zeleqe 149, 150,160  
Afeworq Tekle, Maître Artiste, 35-,151,205  
Ahadou Sabure 100,160  
Akashi, Yasushi 265,268  
Aklilu Habte Wold, 42,90, 102,106  
Al-Bashir, Omar 287  
Alemayehu Haile, Captain 114  
Alemayehu Melaku 14  
Alemayehu Mekonnen 257  
Alexander Dubchek 67  
Ali Aref, Prime Minister 127  
Alpha Oumar Konare, President 288  
Alula Abate 55  
Amaha Aberra, Dejazmatch 55  
Amaha, General 224  
Amanuel Made Michael 135  
Aman Michael Andom, General 33, 111-115  
Amanuel Gebre Selassie, Dr.4, 39-55  
Anders Wijkman 195  
Araft, Yasser 207,311  
Arbour, Louse 289  
Argaw Ahmedeh 16  
Arpad Gonz, President 236,308  
Aseffa Ayene, Gen. 26,79,  
Aseffa Wolde, Ambassador, 233,245  
Asfa Wossen, Crown Prince 25,29,99,244  
Asfaha Wolde Michael, Bitwoded 27,65,77,80  
Ashenafi Teferra Shiawl 4, 306  
Ashenafi Shifferaw 159  
Aske, Dr. 60,62  
Asnaqe Getachew 148,  
Andreas Eshete 12  
Asrat Desta, Colonel, 11,171,197  
Assefa Lemma, Major, Ambassador 4-150  
Atnafu Abate, Col. 109-159  
Ayneshet Teferi 120,  
Ban Ki Moon 314  
Be'alu Girma 33-135-194  
Bedilu Duki, Maj. General, 12,13,156  
Begashaw Gurmessa, Corporal 139  
Bekele Geleta, 203, 213, 218  
Belafonte, Harry 274  
Ben Bella, Ahmed, President 42,299  
Bereket-Ab Habte Selassie, Dr 110  
Bergmann Pohl, President 233  
Berhane Gebray, Dr. 56  
Berhane Mesqel Redda, 35,100,154  
Berhanu Bayih 77-245  
Berhanu Dinka 127-267  
Brezhnev, Leonid, General Secretary 146,182  
Bismark, von 44,45,49  
Brahimi, Lakdar, 258  
Brandt, Willy, Chancellor, 59,77,159  
Bulcha Demeqssa 119  
Botho, Prince 213  
Bush, Sr., President 239  
Boutros Ghali, 265,267  
Callaghan, James 237  
Carlsson, Ingvar 195  
Carel de Rooy 263  
Cohen, Herman 243  
Costantinos Berhe Tesfu, Dr3,204, 260  
Cunhal, Alvaro 188  
Daniel, Colonel 136,146  
Dawit Abdou, Ambassador 103,105  
Dawit Wolde Ghiorgis, Major 175,216  
Dawit Zawde, Dr. 3,258,203,304  
Debebe Haile Mariam, General 30,80  
Deragon Haile Melekot 55,60,61  
Dejene Hilete worq 38  
Deresse Dubale, General 80,107  
Desta Gebru, Woizero 118  
Diallo Telli 166  
Ed Tsui 268  
Elizabeth II, Queen 69,299  
Eguale, Gebre Yohannes Dr. 55,77,82  
Embibel Ayele, General 180  
Endalkachew, Lij 19,106,110-118  
Ephraim Isaac, Professor 22,23,24,254  
Erhardt, Ludwig 59  
Erler, Fritz 59

- Eshetu Chole, Dr. 35,100  
Eyassu Mengesha, Gen., 102,119  
Ezra Gebre Medhin, Professor. 22,37,38  
Fanta Belay, General 224,225  
Fareed Zarif 298  
Fasika Sidelil 3, 186,216,244  
Fasil Nahom, Dr. 23  
Feleqe Gedle Ghiorgis, Colonel-Dr. 176  
Fidel Castro, President 115,146,174,207-212  
Fiqre Selassie Wogderess, Captain. 121-306  
Fiqru Kidane 84  
Fisseha Desta, Colonel 207-241,245  
Fisseha Geda, 176-306  
Fisseha Yimer, Ambassador 233  
Fitigu Tadesse, Dr. 58,114-189  
Frank Lemke 45,56,70  
Gamal Abdel Nasser, President 42,89,94,299  
Ganapathi, Mr. 14  
Gebre Admasu 19  
Genet Aw'alom 38  
Germame Neway 26-29  
Getachew Shibeshi, Major 123  
Getachew Wolde Mariam, Captain 3,10,125-167  
Ghaddafi, Muamar, President 95-312  
Ghandi, Indira, Prime Minister 131  
Giap, General 66  
Girma Alemu 82,100,166  
Girma Beshah 3  
Girma Mengistu 105  
Girma Neway, Gen. 131, 171,206  
Girma Shibeshi 204  
Girma Wolde Ghiorgis, President 218  
Girmachew Tekle Hawariyat, 4,160,182,  
Giscrad d'Estang, President 237  
Goitom Wolde Mariam, Dr. 52,60  
Gorbachev, Mikhail, General Secretary 195-229  
Gorfu, Gebre Medhin 148,160  
Goshu Wolde, Colonel 90,195,200,217  
Gowan, Yacubu, Gen., President 68  
Graham Tyre 61  
Graca Machel 267  
Granzw, Brigitte, Dr. 51,53  
Grazziani, Marshal 7, 89  
Guebeyehu Firissa 34  
Günter Schabowski 231  
Gustav Husak, President 67,207  
Habte Mariam, Assefa, Dr. 51  
Habte Selassie Tafesse 56,197  
Hagos Legesse 39  
Haile Fida, Dr. 33,52,120-153  
Haile Gebre Selassie, Major 86  
Haile Menqerios, Ambassador 269  
Haile Selassie, Emperor 10-300  
Hailu Wolde Amanuel, Ambassador 14,135,245  
Harold Wilson, Prime Minister 64,69  
Hassan Gouled Aptidon, President 127  
Heath, Edward, Prime Minister 64  
Heinrich Luebke, President 60  
Heinz Demezier, Prime Minister 233  
Henok Teferra Shiawl 3-1176,222-303  
Hirut Befecadu 58-82,1176  
Hiruy Amanuel, Ambassador 3, 46,80  
Hiruy Tedla 52  
Honeker, Erich General Secretary 229-334  
Iban Aba 69  
Idris, King, 92  
Ismael Hassan, Ambassador 123  
Isaias Afeworqi, President 53,61,99, -269  
Jafar Nimeiry, President 1103,114,122  
Jamal Mohamed 103  
Kagame, President 259,261,311  
Kasahun Dender, 3  
Kassa Kebede, Ambassador 212  
Kassa Wolde Mariam, Dejazmatch 3, 148-158  
Kaunda, Kenneth, President 207  
Kebede Bezunesh, Dejazmatch 7  
Kebede Gebre, General 27-117  
Kebede Wagaye, Brigadier 26-169  
Kebedech Erdachew 189  
Kenenisa Bekele, 76  
Kennedy, John, President 222,299  
Kenyatta, Jomo, President 69,299  
Ketema Yifru 3,74-164  
Khan, Riz 273  
Kifle Wodajo, Dr. 3,93,119,126-141,198  
Kifle Yitbarek 14  
Kim Il Sung 207,211,213  
King, Martin Luther 66,68  
Kiros Alemayehu, Colonel 128  
Kissinger, Henry, Dr. 237,309  
Kofi Annan 265-313  
Konjit Sine Ghiorgis, Ambassador 233,245  
Krenz, Egon 229  
Kwame Nkrumah, Dr., President 42,43,93,210  
Legesse Asfaw, Captain 184,208-246  
Lemma Gutema, Commander 217-220  
Lemma Kibret, Brigadier, 12,



- Lemma Frew 29  
Lieu Hsiao Chi, President 132  
Lolobrigida, Gina 86  
Mahateme Selassie, Blatten Geta 148  
Mairegu Bezabeh 131,171,187  
Mama Mersha 156  
Mamadou Kane 270  
Mamo Tadesse 148,150  
Mamo Wolde, Captain 71,85  
Mansour Khalid, Dr. 103  
Marcos Teferra Shiawl 3 81-310  
Martha Tadesse 190,199  
Mary Robinson 209,271-311  
Mehari Measho 206  
Mekonnen Habte Wold 17,27  
Mekonnen Demissie 40,70  
Mekonnen, Dr. 205  
Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister 91,253-310  
Melke Tsedeq, Abuna 153  
Menassie Haile, Dr. 63-93  
Menelik II, Emperor 14,70,183  
Mennen, Empress 25  
Mengesha Seyoum, Ras 122  
Mengisteh Desta, Ambassador 122  
Mengistu Haile Mariam, President 91-307  
Mengistu Neway, Gen. 25,29,34  
Merid Mengesha, Gen. 25,26, 28  
Merid Negussie, General 224,225  
Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Professor 33,198,243  
Michael Emru, Lij 29, ,111,124  
Million Wolde Mesquel 199  
Miruts Yifter, Captain 85  
Moges, Major 137  
Moges Tekle Michael 33  
Mohamed Al Amoudi, Sheik, Dr.16  
Mohamed Mirghani 103  
Molla Zegeye 156  
Mohamed Sahnoun, Ambassador 270  
Mulatua Haile Selassie 56,60  
Mulugeta Asrate 143  
Mulugeta Luleh 3,21  
Naraian Eswaran 87  
Nebure Id Ermias Kebede 161  
Negede Gobeze, Dr. 52,120,  
Negussie Desta 71  
Negussie Habte Wold 63  
Negussie Mengesha 12,81,86  
Negussie Roba 85  
Nelson Mandela 257,259  
Nessibu Taye, Colonel 184  
Netsanet Asfaw 56  
Ping, Jean 277,313  
Obasanjo, General 237,309  
Ojukwu, Colonel 68  
Palme, Olav 195  
Qazi, Ashraf, Ambassador 296  
Ramcharan, Bertrand, Prof. 271,274-278  
Saddam Hussain, President 98,238,266,291-296  
Sahle Worq Zewde, Ambassador 245  
Sahlitu Ketsela 156  
Salim Ahmed Salim, Dr. 270  
Samuel Assefa, Dr. 165,255  
Samuel Beyene, General 151,158  
Sasahulish Kidane 9  
Schaeffer, Dr. Ulrich 44,49,60  
Scheel, Walter 86,100  
Schmidt, Helmut 59,237  
Schmitz-Wenzel, Hermann, Dr. 213  
Schulenberg, Michael von, Dr. 213  
Sydney, Poirier 86  
Seifu Mahateme Selassie, 158  
Seifu Tekle Mariam 12,34  
Senedu Gebru, (Woizero) Dr. 78-165  
Sergio Vieira de Mello 268,277,  
Seyoum Heregot, Dr. 147,148  
Seyoum Mesfin 3,92,141,247, 310  
Sharayev, Anatoly 181,  
Shaukat, Fareed 268  
Shiawl Kidaneqal, Aleqa (Senior Pastor) 7, 182, 183  
Shimelis Adugna 101  
Shimelis Mazengia 185, 186,192  
Singh, Jyoti 271  
Sissay Habte, Major 128,129  
Skardt, Thorild 264  
Solomon Berhanu 156  
Solomon Enquay, Dr. 22  
Stalin, Joseph, 295  
Starauss, Franz-Joseph 59  
Tadele Yidneqachew 3,83  
Tadelech Haile Michael, Ambassador 251  
Tadesse Metcha 10  
Tadesse Gebre Kidan, Ambassador 205,233  
Tadesse Terefe, Ambassador, 20  
Tadesse Yaqob 148  
Tamrat Kebede 3,155,255  
Tamrat Layneh 248,260  
Tamrat Wolde mariam, Lt. 138,140,158  
Tauschoe. Dr. 30,31

- Tedla Bairu, Dejazmatch 52,53  
Teferi Bante, General 10,120,125  
Teferi Buzuayehu 23  
Teferra Shiawl-Kidaneqal, Ambassador 1-318  
Teferra Tizzazu, Dr.28, 38  
Teferra Worq Kidane Wold, Tsehafe Tiizaz 158  
Teferra Degefe 253  
Teferra Haile Selassie, Ambassador 242,243  
Tegegne Yetesha Worq 67  
Teka Tulu, Col. 184  
Tekola Dejene 234  
Temple-Black, Shirley, 238,245  
Tekeda Alemu Dr 3, 248  
Tsfaye Dinka 216,223,238,243  
Tsfaye Gebre Egzi, Dr 77  
Tsfaye Gebre Kidan, General 136 137, 244  
Tsfaye Maru 234  
Tsfaye Tadesse Gebre Heywot 3-242  
Tsfaye Tadesse Wolde Medhin 125,153  
Tsfaye Tequame 155  
Tsfaye Wolde Selassie, Colonel. 194  
Teshome Gebre Mariam 77,148,160  
Teshome Teklu, Dr. 12,71,81  
Teshome Tsfaye 195  
Teuscher, Wolfgang 54  
Tibebe Yemane-Berhan, Dr. 205  
Tibebu Bekele, Ambassador 4,233,245  
Tibebu Shifferaw, Lieutenant, Ambassador 131  
Tilahun Gizaw 35  
Tito, Marshal 299  
Triki, Ali. 91  
Tsehay Feleqe 203,218  
Tsega Amanuel 46  
Ulrich Fick, Reverend 44,56  
Vaclav Havel, President,236,239  
Von Stupnagel, Ambassador 38,  
Wehner, Herbert 59  
William Wright 20,  
Woineshet Kebede Wagaye, 3, 8-309  
Wolde Mesqel Qostre, Dr. 85  
Wolde Ab Wolde Mariam 73  
Worqneh Gebeyehu, Colonel 29  
Wossen Beshah, Ambassador 128,245,263  
Yidneqachew Tesemma 43,66,83,166  
Yeshash Worq Yilma, Princess 194  
Jesus Worq Zafu 25,40,43,44  
Yidneqachew Tessema 74,92,93,188  
Yilma Deressa 90,148  
Yilma Kassaye 234  
Yohannes Kifle 33  
Yohannes Mengesha 123  
Yohannes, Major 138  
Yhannes Misikir, Major 29,30  
Yonas Tegegne, Dr. 261  
Yoseph Assefa 281  
Yoseph Kebede Wagaye, Dr 79  
Zerfu, Balambaras 180,181  
Zewde Abate, Dr. 12  
Zewde Gebre Heywot, Bitwoded 148  
Zewde Gebre Selassie, Dej. Dr. 112  
Zewde Haile Mariam, Ambassador 18,55  
Zewde Retta 41  
Zewdu Tadesse 80,90  
Zewdineh Yimtatu, Dr. 207  
Zewditu Tsfaye 44-119  
Zulfikar Ali Bhutho 299  
Zhuvkov, Thodor 207